

LIBERATING BIBLICAL EDUCATION WITH WOMEN:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER FOR METHODOLOGY
IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Liberating Biblical Education with Women: The Implications of Gender for Methodology in Religious Education

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This work grows out of a series of theoretical and pastoral concerns. The first concern is the issue of gender. Recent studies indicate that gender plays an important role in shaping the experiences, values, world view and behavior of a majority of women. An investigation of the uniqueness of women's experience could enrich studies in religious education. A second concern is the goal of liberation. Liberation scholars have demonstrated that education which does not consciously educate for liberation can promote oppression. Religious education especially needs to address the issue of women's liberation, for Christian theology and biblical hermeneutics have often been employed to oppress women. A third concern is the implications of feminist theology for religious education. Some feminists argue that the only way to liberate women is to eliminate the Bible altogether. The possibility of teaching the Bible in a way that fosters wholeness and liberation for women must be explored. A final concern is the question of biblical education. What methodology

would be helpful in teaching the Bible in the context of the late 20th century? How should the Bible be taught to the many women that attend Bible studies?

This work addresses the context of Protestant, white, middle-class church women in the United States, although the implications may extend to other groups of women also. Chapter 1 contributes an examination of four elements that are necessary for liberation: radical journey, transformative images, critical consciousness, and liberative community. Chapter 2 provides a study of educational theory for teaching the Bible proposed by 20th century scholars. A summary of studies that investigate "women's subculture" is the topic of the third chapter. Chapter 4 contributes a dialogue in biblical hermeneutics between canonical and feminist biblical scholars, such as James A. Sanders and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and it offers a model of liberating biblical hermeneutics. The last chapter weaves together the strands of liberation, educational theory, women's experience, and biblical hermeneutics developed in the previous chapters. This concluding chapter proposes a new methodology for liberating biblical education with women that contains three dimensions: hearing, naming, and re-creation.

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INTRODUCTION

This work grew out of the investigation of several theoretical and pastoral concerns that needed to be addressed in Christian religious education. The first is the issue of gender and education. Educational theory often takes factors such as age, developmental stage, cultural background, and socioeconomic status into account. The factor of gender has rarely been considered. Yet recent studies in women's psychology and sociology demonstrate that gender is a critical factor affecting the reality within which women live. Women may even form a subculture, with a special set of values, world views, and behavior. Gender affects the way women are socialized into society. Therefore it affects the way they develop psychologically and spiritually. It influences the manner in which they learn, know, and understand the world. Gender is certainly a significant factor to consider when educational theory is developed.

The second concern is the issue of liberation. Liberation scholars such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Luis Segundo, and Paolo Freire, have cogently demonstrated that education usually supports the status quo in society. It enculturates children and adults into the values, beliefs, world views and behavior that perpetuate the power system

of society. It promotes the continuation of power for the wealthy and powerful. It supports the continuation of the oppression of the poor and powerless. The educational system in the United States functions in the same way. Although educational ideology proclaims that American education gives all students equal access to power and wealth, the reality is that it perpetuates the oppression of the poor, the lower classes, and people of color.¹

Education that does not explicitly educate for liberation will not be able to avoid promoting oppression. North American religious educators are beginning to address this problem. However, they have not thought of liberation in terms of women's oppression. Many studies demonstrate that a large majority of those who live below, or near the poverty line are women. Women earn less than two-thirds of the income of men.² Women's occupations and roles are far more restricted than men's. Furthermore, cultural ideology promotes ideas such as the superiority of men and the unimportance of women's work outside the home.

Women's oppression has been supported by Christian biblical theology. Biblical hermeneutics have been employed to justify keeping women from leadership in the

¹ See Caroline Hodges Persell, Education and Inequality (New York: Free Press/Macmillan, 1977).

² See, for example, Ronald C. Federico and Janet S. Schwartz, Sociology, 3rd ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1983), 138.

church and in society. They have been used to support the restrictive social and economic roles for women which have made them a silent and powerless group. Biblical images, such as the image of Eve as the source of all evil (1 Timothy 2:14), have contributed to society's view of women as inferior and less-than-human. The image of God as male has also contributed to this view. For although the Bible states in Genesis 1:27 that humans, both male and female, were created in God's image, women have less often than men been seen as reflections of God. In this way biblical theology has often made women feel inferior and unlovable.

Yet the Bible has been, and continues to be, a source of liberation for many women as well as men. The women who make up the majority of our churches find comfort and strength in it. Women have heard God's call for justice and equality through biblical texts, and have included themselves as subjects of that call. Biblical women have served as role models of leadership and strength. Many biblical women have been clearly God's instruments of love and salvation. However, the stories of these women are rarely studied in church Bible study. The role of women in the history of salvation has often been hidden or lost.

A third concern is the issue of the implications of feminist theology for biblical education. Feminists are divided over the role the Bible could play in women's liberation. Some, such as Mary Daly, believe its

patriarchal character is so profound that it is irredeemable. It must be cast away. Others, such as Rosemary Reuther, search for the prophetic aspects of its message which call for liberation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out that we cannot afford to ignore the Bible, for two reasons. First, its role in promoting the oppression of women has been, and still is, so large that it cannot be ignored. In order to liberate women, the oppression of the Bible must be addressed. Second, its role in promoting liberation has also been important. The Bible is an important resource for women's freedom and wholeness.³

A final concern is the whole question of biblical education. Religious education needs to reexamine educational theory and method for teaching the Bible in the context of the late 20th century. What are the ways in which the current context shapes biblical theology and education? In what ways can biblical education help to shape the theology and lifestyles of Christians in the 21st century? In what ways can biblical education work to promote liberation for all people in this era?

My concern in bringing together the issues of gender, liberation, feminist theology, and biblical education grows out of my experience as a clergywoman and religious educator. Because of my role in the church, I have often been

³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone (Boston: Beacon, 1984), xiii.

called on to teach Bible study. I have also been recruited for leading women's meetings and retreats. I have shared some feminist theology at these gatherings. I have also taught denominational materials, which included Bible studies written for women. The majority of people participating in worship and in education in my denomination today are women. Yet religious education has not yet investigated the implications of this reality. Denominational materials do not thoroughly address it either.

In this work, therefore, I am working to develop a methodology for liberating biblical education with women. A note on terms. By biblical education I mean education which has as its topic the study of biblical texts and traditions. Biblical education is any education in which the teacher and learners are in significant dialogue with the Bible. Therefore, studies of prayer, justice, religion and politics, homosexuality, and other topics can all be considered biblical education if the Bible is an important part of the educational dialogue.

Another key word is with. Liberation is a journey that takes place in community, walking side-by-side and hand-in-hand. It is also a journey one must choose. No one else can walk the journey for us. Liberating education, then, cannot be done for others. It must be a process of journeying with them. This educational methodology attempts to make the liberation journey accessible to women, and to give the nourishment, support, and

strength for the journey.⁴

In order to develop a liberating methodology for biblical education with women, we must describe the goal carefully. Chapter 1 discusses the nature of our goal of liberation, drawing on the work of Latin American and feminist theologians. Four important elements of liberation are identified and described: radical journey, transformative images, critical consciousness, and liberative community. Implications of these elements for biblical hermeneutics and educational methodology are considered.

Chapter 2 contributes in two ways. It sets this piece of religious educational theory in its historical and theological context as it considers the work of religious educators in this century from George Albert Coe to Nelle Morton. It especially focuses on their theories of teaching the Bible. Secondly, the rich work of these educators forms a mine of brilliant ideas that can aid our endeavor. Some of these ideas are later woven into the proposed methodology.

Chapter 3 addresses the gender issue. It posits that women, as a result of their gender, form a subculture with certain values, beliefs and behavior. Studies in the

⁴ See Mary Boys, "Access to Traditions and Transformation," Tradition and Transformation in Religious Education, ed. Padraig O'Hare (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1970), 9-34, for the idea that education makes transformation accessible.

areas of women's psychology, sociology, and anthropology are examined. Women's ways of thinking and knowing are described. Some implications of these findings for religious education are offered.

At the heart of teaching the Bible is the question of hermeneutics. To help form a model of liberating biblical hermeneutics, the work of biblical scholars is investigated. The hermeneutics advocated by canonical critics such as James A. Sanders and Walter Brueggemann are examined. They are then compared with the liberating feminist hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. The liberating theological metaphors of Sallie McFague are also considered. Out of the dialogue grows a model of dialectical biblical hermeneutics, with an understanding of revelation and authority, that empowers liberating biblical education.

Finally the strands from each of our studies are woven together to form a whole. I suggest that liberating biblical education with women consists of three dimensions: hearing, naming, and re-creation. These three dimensions can occur sequentially or in any simultaneous combination. All three are necessary in making the liberation journey accessible to women as they study the Bible.

Suggestions for a methodology of liberating biblical education with women are presented here but they do not form the only answers. Many ways could exist to introduce the factor of gender and the problem of liberation into

religious education. Many ways are needed. This model grows out of a middle-class, white, North American context. It may not speak to many groups of women. Religious education needs a multiplicity of models to challenge and stimulate us. Such a multiplicity would foster greater creativity and sensitivity in our work. My hope is that this work may be one step in that direction.

CHAPTER 1

The Experience of Liberation:

Description and Implications

The concept most central to this inquiry is liberation. Many concepts will be briefly defined as the inquiry unfolds, but the notion of liberation requires more careful study. This chapter probes deeply into what theologians and educators mean by liberation. The clarity and depth are important because liberation is the goal of this pedagogy.

To reflect on the nature of liberation is to take the first step toward what can be called the praxis of liberation. Praxis is defined by Paolo Freire as "the reflection and action which truly transform reality."¹ Freire argues that activity without reflection can be neither fully human nor transformative.² Reflection enables us to bring to conscious awareness the nature of our experiences. Once these experiences are conscious, we can name and find meaning in them. We are also able to analyze their implications for our goal of liberation. This knowledge allows us to inspect our actions with a critical eye and to plan

¹ Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Seabury, 1973), 91.

² Ibid.

meaningful and transformative actions and reflections.

Six liberation scholars will be our guides. Each scholar has a unique point of view that has come to represent a major scholarly understanding of liberation. Each one maintains a different relationship with Christianity and the church. Paolo Freire and Juan Luis Gutierrez represent Latin American liberation thought. Freire, an avowed Christian and Marxist, speaks as an educator. Gutierrez' voice is that of a leading Roman Catholic theologian. Letty Russell, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Nelle Morton and Mary Daly are North American feminist theologians each with a unique voice. These four feminists speak out of different contexts: within the church, outside the church, and firmly against the church. Each of our scholars speaks for the oppressed, out of her/his own experience with the oppressed and with oppression. They speak out of their personal knowledge of liberation as well as out of their biblical, theological, and/or educational studies. The clarity, the depth, and the passion of their thought have made them leaders in the area of liberation.

Many similarities can be found in these scholars' descriptions of liberation. The vocabulary, the turn-of-phrase, the poetry differ, but the underlying realities of oppression and liberation are the same. All who have known liberation from oppression possess a common vision and understanding. Yet each person also speaks out of a

particular context. The language employed by Gutierrez and Freire clearly indicates that they speak out of a male context. The women scholars speak out of a female context. I, too, as a woman scholar developing a pedagogy of women, speak out of a North American, white female context. This reflection on the nature of liberation is guided by my experience of liberation. Therefore, this chapter will most often refer to the liberation of women in my context.³

Out of the experiences and reflections of these liberation theologians, we will be able to name and describe the liberation experience, at least in part. This description has implications for the choice of biblical hermeneutics and educational method. Reflection helps to shape future educational and hermeneutical actions that will create liberating praxis.

Liberation involves the individual and community in a process of growth into full humanity.⁴ It is a transformative process of great energy. But what is meant by "full

³ Differences do exist between Latin American and feminist liberationists. Latin American theologians, usually male, tend to see women's liberation as a secondary issue. Feminists see feminism as more radical. As Rosemary Radford Ruether puts it: feminism "goes behind the symbolic universe constructed by patriarchal civilization." Women-Church (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 3. Differences also exist between white feminists and feminists of color. Yet the similarities among liberation thinkers are interesting and informative.

⁴ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 28; see also Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (New York: Orbis, 1984), 32.

humanity"? In order to answer this question and describe liberation, four elements of the liberation experience have been isolated: radical journey, transformative images, critical consciousness, and liberative community. Each of these elements of liberation involves the psychological, spiritual, social, and political transformation of the individual and community. Of course, the attempt to label sections of experience as separate, such as psychological, spiritual, social and political, is artificial. An important consequence of the liberation journey is the awareness that life is a unity. Spiritual and political are not separate; psychological and social are inseparable. Nelle Morton states this reality succinctly: "The political is personal, the personal is political."⁵ Nevertheless, for analytical purposes, we will sometimes consider them separately, keeping their unity in mind at all times.

As we describe liberation, we will discover that each element presents implications for biblical hermeneutics and for educational method. The radical journey element of liberation suggests the movement toward a hopeful future and the use of a biblical hermeneutic of anticipation and an anticipatory mode of education. The element of transformative images shows the need for prophetic or parabolic images of God. This element therefore suggests the

⁵ Nelle Morton, The Journey is Home (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 112.

biblical hermeneutic of God's bias for the oppressed with its prophetic image of God. An imagistic educational methodology is helpful for developing this element of liberation. Critical consciousness offers the possibility of employing a hermeneutic of suspicion and a praxis, problem-posing educational methodology. Liberative community calls for the hermeneutics of remembrance and creative actualization, with an educational methodology of story. These hermeneutics, often actualized in story, create and deepen community. Reflection on these elements of liberation deepens our comprehension of what is required for the development of liberating biblical education with women.

Radical Journey

Every writer speaks of liberation as a process, as well as a goal. Active verbs and gerunds predominate: moving, learning, dancing, freeing, partnering, perceiving, growing. Perhaps this is due to the visionary nature of the goal. Gutierrez discourses on the importance of a "realistic" utopian vision for liberation.⁶ Liberation is a process that is fueled by strong doses of hope.⁷ It is a journey towards a goal of "full humanization,"⁸ of saying

⁶ Gutierrez, 234.

⁷ Letty Russell, Growth in Partnership (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 15; Morton, The Journey is Home, 14.

⁸ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 28; Gutierrez, 32.

yes to our Selves,⁹ of dignity, solidarity and participation in the destiny of one's community.¹⁰

This movement from oppression to freedom is and must be revolutionary and radical. Morton cautions us that there is more at stake than reform. The agenda of this journey is "far more revolutionary--the recovery of the spiritual and the survival of humankind."¹¹ Gutierrez carefully describes how developmentalism, reformism, and modernization--all ideas aimed at transformation--ultimately failed because they did not attack the roots of evil.¹² Therefore he uses the term liberation to speak of "the conquest of new, qualitatively different ways of being a man. . . ."¹³ and of "man . . . in search of a qualitatively different society in which he will be free from all servitude, in which he will be the artisan of his own destiny."¹⁴ Russell points out that the goal is to be part of a new order; small gains in the old order are not sufficient.¹⁵ Freire employs the metaphors of conversion and painful childbirth to describe the fundamental, radical

⁹ Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology (Boston: Beacon, 1978), xii.

¹⁰ Letty Russell, Growth in Partnership, 83.

¹¹ Morton, The Journey is Home, 197.

¹² Gutierrez, 26; see also Chapter 2.

¹³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴ Ibid., 91.

¹⁵ Letty Russell, Growth in Partnership, 15.

transformation that is a part of the liberation journey.¹⁶ The old is not simply reformed. The old--oppressive structures, psychological and spiritual chains--are destroyed to let the new take its place.

Another key characteristic of a journey is that it is movement from somewhere to somewhere else. This movement from and to is reflected in the multi-faceted transformations on the journey: spiritual, psychological, social, and political. The explosive movement from the abyss of despair that many oppressed women experience, to the new vision of hope, empowers psychological and spiritual transformation.¹⁷ In this journey, says Morton, women "come to see that the gift of themselves is precious, sacred, with unique potential."¹⁸ Daly vividly describes the psychological and spiritual journey as multi-dimensional, a "journey of women becoming."¹⁹ Patriarchy is exorcised, within and without.²⁰ The liberation process is a complex participation in being, through which women become woman-identified,²¹ exorcising "the internalized Godfather in his

¹⁶ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppression, 33, 47.

¹⁷ Morton, The Journey is Home, 13-17.

¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁹ Daly, Gyn/Ecology, 1, 4.

²⁰ Ibid., 34.

²¹ Ibid., xii.

various manifestations."²² Women journey from seeing God in male images to seeing God as female as well as male.²³ These changes create a movement from agony to ecstasy,²⁴ from passivity to creativity, from isolation to solidarity.

The journey is one of "naming ourselves"²⁵ and defining our own living.²⁶ Therefore it also becomes a movement from old social structures to a new society. Gutierrez understands this process as a turning away from sin.²⁷ He envisions the turning to, to God and neighbor, in concrete social and political terms in a qualitatively new society (as mentioned above). The poetry of Mary Daly also does not separate the inner growth in awareness from outer action.²⁸ Liberation is a "movement against female domestication."²⁹ It is thus movement from acceptance of old roles and political structures to the creation of new roles and structures.

²² Ibid., 1.

²³ See Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 53-71.

²⁴ Daly, Gyn/Ecology, 33.

²⁵ Ibid., 7. Naming oneself has become almost a catch-phrase in feminist literature to describe the liberation process of taking charge of one's own life. See especially Carol P. Christ, Diving Deep and Surfacing (Boston: Beacon, 1980), 24.

²⁶ Daly, Gyn/Ecology, 33.

²⁷ Gutierrez, 35.

²⁸ Daly, Gyn/Ecology, 6.

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

A third key characteristic of the liberation journey is that God is involved. Of course, the way in which God is seen to participate differs with different theologians. For some scholars, the Exodus story in the Bible is an important paradigm for the liberation journey. This story tells of the journey from slavery to freedom, a journey of both spiritual and political dimensions.

Gutierrez points out that in the Hebrew Scriptures the Exodus is the central event,

a historical-salvific fact which structures the faith of Israel. And this fact is a political liberation through which Yahweh expresses his love for his people and the gift of total liberation is received.³⁰

For Gutierrez, creation and re-creation through liberation are salvific acts of God and Christ. God's work of political liberation is rooted in the basic religious covenant of God with the people and God's desire to make them holy. The Exodus journey is paradigmatic for our journey. It involves the will of God and the free consent of humankind to engage in God's salvific, liberating work.³¹

For Russell, also, the Exodus journey is the story of God's grace, of God's call to wholeness through partnership with others, and of God's participation in liberation as a

³⁰ Gutierrez, 137.

³¹ Ibid., 158-159.

social-political process.³² Humankind is invited to share in God's work of deliverance. We are invited to form a community of freedom and mutual responsibility, based on the freedom of God and founded on the hope given by the liberating action of God.³³

For other feminist theologians, the stories of God's acts have been so shaped by patriarchy that God's involvement in the liberation process is not clear. For many women, the journey from is a journey from a male God to the image of Goddess or some concept of Being more difficult to describe. Yet a strong sense exists that this newly-known Goddess is involved in the liberation process with us. Ruether declares, in the summary of her work Sexism and God-Talk, "Divine Grace keeps faith with us when we have broken faith with her. Through the years of alien madness, she did not abandon us. . . ."³⁴

Nelle Morton sees the metaphor of Goddess as essential to women's liberation from oppression and invisibility. The appearance of the Goddess has helped women recover the importance of their roles in ancient history. Goddess has exposed "the artificiality in the elaborate hierarchical system of a male-oriented deity."³⁵ Most importantly,

³² Letty Russell, Growth in Partnership, 70.

³³ Ibid., 65, 67.

³⁴ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 266.

³⁵ Morton, The Journey is Home, 169.

Goddess has helped in "the transformation of women ourselves."³⁶ Morton clearly sees the appearance of the metaphor as indicative of the reality of Goddess. With Goddess, she states, "Women are no longer minus a cosmic advocate, rooted in creation itself, to provide legitimation for and to affirm our experiences."³⁷

For Mary Daly, liberation is also filled with Being. Women in "creative journeying" "unweave the prevailing disorder,"³⁸ reweaving a new order. This order grows out of naming women's Selves. Together, women are

finding/creating/spiraling a new Spring. This Spring within and among us makes being possible, and makes the process of integrity possible. . . . Our discovery of the Spring within us enables us to begin asking the right questions.³⁹

A fourth characteristic of the liberation journey mentioned by some of our scholars is its eschatological character. Russell describes the "already/not yet character" of the liberation partnership of God, ourselves and each other.⁴⁰ When we work on new creation, we must anticipate it and realize that it is not yet fully present.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 170.

³⁸ Daly, Gyn/Ecology, 417.

³⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁰ Letty Russell, Growth in Partnership, 23. Also Letty Russell, Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 45-49.

At the same time, we must see the new creation as being present in God's and humankind's work among us.

Gutierrez echoes these thoughts in his own way. In condemning a theological stance that only looks for liberation to happen at the end of history, he asserts the concrete and present historical nature of liberative actions by God and humankind. At the same time, however, he is aware that liberation is not always clearly visible. He states:

The eschatological promises are being fulfilled throughout history, but this does not mean that they can be identified clearly and completely with one or another social reality; their liberating effect goes far beyond the foreseeable and opens up new and unsuspected possibilities.⁴¹

The tension in liberation between the here and the not here is partly what makes it an exciting, dynamic, surprising, painful/joyful journey. The vision of hope fulfilled pushes us onward. The pain of past and present slavery and the joy of some present freedom give us energy to keep traveling. The journey is open-minded, as Gutierrez emphasizes. Future possibilities may be altogether new and unsuspected. The seeds of the future may not lie where we expect them. We must be in process always, willing to have our own blindness removed, willing to risk the unsuspected changes that will occur. We must be aware that we are always journeying, and that this is natural. The journey

⁴¹ Gutierrez, 168.

is the reality in which we live. The journey is our home.⁴²

An image is perhaps the best way to describe the liberation journey. An image that may express this reality for us is that of hiking up a mountain trail. As the trail winds around the mountain, we often seem to double back on ourselves. Yet each time we are a little higher: the view is broader and more encompassing, the horizon has stretched. As we cross the mountain pass, we exult in the beauty and joy of having made the climb. At the same time, we feel the pain in our muscles and lungs from the climb. We also anticipate the new mountain ranges that become accessible as a result of this present journey--mountains that had been blocked by the mountains we have just traversed. The process of climbing, seeing new vistas and overcoming obstacles, strengthen and transform us. We will never be the same. Spiraling onward, we know we can no longer turn back. We must continue onward, experiencing new pain perhaps, and encountering new sources of joy. Even when we return back over the old trail, the experience will be different. As we travel, the trail may seem the same, but our perceptions are different. At the same time, new meadows are filled with familiar flowers, new streams are crossed with both old and new companions. Our journey is an ever-changing process of old becoming new, and of new

⁴² Morton, The Journey is Home.

being freshly discovered. This journey is indeed our home.

In sum, an important feature of liberation is that it is a radical journey. The transformation that occurs on the journey must be from oppression to freedom, as we have described. Without this movement, the transformative journey is not liberating. The liberating journey also has God at its center. It lives with the eschatological tension of experiencing liberation as here and not yet here. The radical journey feature of liberation points to certain possibilities for appropriate biblical hermeneutics and educational methodology for liberating biblical education.

Biblical Hermeneutics

James A. Sanders defines hermeneutics as:

those means used to translate a thought or an event from one cultural context [from an ancient text] to another [our modern times] There has to be some kind of conversion key, as it were, to bring the one over into the other if the integrity of the text is to be honored and somehow preserved, and if that text is to be heard at all by the modern listener.⁴³

Sanders develops his hermeneutic principles, his conversion key, by locating hermeneutic acts that exist within the canon. The hermeneutics employed by the ancient biblical communities allowed the adaptation of the old traditions in order to bring salvation in new contexts. These

⁴³ James A. Sanders, God Has a Story Too (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 8.

hermeneutics are paradigmatic for the modern interpreter, suggesting the possible shape of our contemporary hermeneutics.⁴⁴

For Sanders, the Holy Spirit guided the hermeneutical processes found in the Bible.⁴⁵ In other words, the process that shaped the Bible was revelatory. God continues to be revealed today when communities utilize these hermeneutic principles to bring the Bible to speak to their contemporary experience.⁴⁶ The oppressed have discovered that God is also revealed when the contemporary community engages in the praxis of liberation. Thus revelation is located in several different acts: (1) the encounter of the ancient biblical communities with their traditions--an encounter which shaped the biblical texts we now have, (2) the reflection and action for liberation engaged in by contemporary communities, and (3) the encounter of the contemporary community with the biblical texts. The third locus of revelation comes from the meeting, or intersection, of the first two. At this intersection both the biblical text and contemporary community are reinterpreted and illumined by one another. This intersection is the context that shapes our choice of hermeneutics.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 11

⁴⁵ James A. Sanders, Canon and Community (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), xvii.

⁴⁶ James A. Sanders, From Sacred Story to Sacred Text (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 65.

Letty Russell draws in her work on Sanders' concept of prophetic critique, a critique that kept reminding the people of the freedom of God. This idea of the freedom of God "reminds us to expect the unexpected."⁴⁷ In trying to find "our analogies to the present" in the biblical text, we must learn to think about God's acts in the world, to anticipate them and work with them.⁴⁸ She calls for the development of the "art of anticipation."⁴⁹

The nature of the liberation journey, and Russell's theological insights, call for a hermeneutic of anticipation. This interpretive principle states that God is the free Creator. God continually creates new, surprising, realities. We as interpreters are to look for this new creation. The biblical texts reflect in many places this hope and anticipation. "Behold, I am doing a new thing;" declares Yahweh, "now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19).

Anticipation of God's new work is held in spite of experiences to the contrary, experiences of pain and oppression. God's new liberating creations are searched for and anticipated, even when the signs of their coming are obscure or hidden. The eschatological nature of liberation helps us cling to hope, at the same time that we are

⁴⁷ Letty Russell, Growth in Partnership, 96.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 97-103.

realistic about the partial reality of liberation in our time. The hermeneutic of anticipation is not to be used to cover up the evils, the forces against freedom and wholeness, that loom large in our lives. Instead it calls for celebration of God's work among us in the face of what seem like overwhelming odds. This hermeneutic is found in the Psalms, where the writer can cry:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? . . .
 All the ends of the earth shall remember and
 turn to Yahweh. . . .
 . . . and proclaim his deliverance to a people
 yet unborn,
 that he has wrought it. (Psalm 22:1, 27a, 31)

This principle guides us in our encounters with the biblical text to look for the liberation journey and to anticipate the unexpected. In the face of evil, we can declare that God and humans in partnership are creating a new world of freedom and wholeness.

Educational Methodology

Anticipation is also a key word for the educational implications of liberation as journey. James W. Botkin, Mahdi Elmandjra, and Mircea Malitza call for new educational modes of learning to deal adequately and well with the complexity of our times.⁵⁰ They describe "innovative learning." Maintenance learning is "the acquisition of fixed outlooks, methods, and rules for dealing with known and recurring situations." It is "indispensable to the

⁵⁰ James W. Botkin, Mahdi Elmandjra, and Mircea Malitza, No Limits to Learning (New York: Pergamon, 1979).

functioning and stability of every society."⁵¹ However, it is not adequate to help human beings learn what they need to know in order to deal with contemporary complexities and the long-term survival of the planet. To this end we need innovative learning, a type of learning "that can bring change, renewal, restructuring and problem reformulation."⁵² This type of learning "emphasizes value-creating more than value-conserving."⁵³ It is appropriate to the global, complex nature of human existence today.

One of the primary features of innovative learning is anticipation. Anticipatory learning is learning with vision. The authors state:

Anticipation is not limited simply to encouraging desirable trends and averting potentially catastrophic ones; it is also the "inventing" or creating of new alternatives where none existed before.⁵⁴

Anticipation is based on imagination, but "is not to be confused with it." A good educator is one who has "developed and can communicate a sense of the future." Anticipatory education develops abilities for mental simulation. It also becomes a "pervasive attitude" of "taking responsibility for our ability to influence--and

⁵¹ Ibid., 10.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 25

in some cases, determine--the future."⁵⁵ Such education contains

an increased emphasis on conjectures, hypotheses, scenarios, simulations, models, trends, plans, long-term views, and an examination of the hidden implications of our actions--both in our individual thinking and in the debates of the society at large.⁵⁶

The nature of liberation as journey calls us to envision a new anticipatory kind of learning in religious education and the teaching of the Bible. Anticipatory learning in religious education would help students recognize God's liberating work in our world and in our lives. It would guide them to examine their actions as God's partners in liberation. It would help them utilize a hermeneutic of anticipation in the study of biblical texts and traditions. Anticipatory education would thereby open the doors to the possibility of experiencing and promoting liberation.

Mary Boys formulates the idea of education which makes transformation "accessible."⁵⁷ No educational method can guarantee transformation. That is the choice of the student. Anticipatory education is one way to help make liberation accessible.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 26-28.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 28-29.

⁵⁷ Boys, "Access to Traditions and Transformation," 9-34.

Transformative Images

Symbols give rise to thought. This statement is fast becoming an axiom. Among liberation scholars, the feminists have taken this idea most seriously. Drawing from the works of such thinkers as Carl Jung, Paul Ricoeur, Amos Wilder, Suzanne Langer, and, most of all, drawing from their own experiences, feminist scholars are choosing to look at the role of symbols, images and metaphors in oppression and liberation. These scholars' studies indicate that images are related to language. Images are often consciously employed to shape the way we think. They operate most powerfully, however, through the subconscious. They are often preconceptual, unconscious, and unidentified. Images are linked with feelings as much as with thought. As a result of their effect in shaping language and consciousness, the role of images must be considered prior to the role of critical consciousness.

The clearest discussion of the way images can support oppressive structures or can create new realities is found in Morton's The Journey is Home. Although her ideas will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2, we will briefly look at her thought here. Morton states:

[Images] refer to that entity which rises out of conscious and unconscious lives individually and in community that may shape styles of life long before conceptualization may take place.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Morton, The Journey is Home, 20.

Images are not simply "a picture in the mind's eye."⁵⁹

They are "a dynamic through which one communicates...."⁶⁰

They are often closely linked to political realities. They help to shape the social and political structures within which we all must live.

Images form our psychological images of ourselves.

Images are created for us in spoken and written metaphors.

For example, a black child in Africa learns at a very young age that white is considered superior by society, and that she is considered inferior. This lesson comes through hearing metaphors such as "pure as white snow," "black-hearted," "the light that shines in the darkness."⁶¹

Women have learned, through such derisive expressions as "effeminate," "you drive like a woman," "you play like a girl!," about their lack of worth in the eyes of society.

Psychological images of inferiority also grow out of actions. Morton recounts, for example, the heart-rending story of a little poor Brooklyn girl of Jamaican origin whom she had encouraged to sign up for summer camp in the country. Morton picked her up at her home to drive her to the boat that was to take the children to camp. The little girl was wearing her beautifully starched clothes and her

⁵⁹ Ibid., 131.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 21.

tightly braided hair with pride and excitement. When they arrived at the boat, the woman in charge looked at the little girl and said, shaking her head sadly, "Oh, it's too bad you are not just a little bit lighter, or we could have sneaked you on. But you are too dark dear." Morton then had to drive this little girl, with her suitcase full of carefully starched clothes, probably all the clothes she owned, back home. The lesson for the little girl was starkly obvious. She was inferior because she was "too dark."⁶² What would it take to eradicate or change this image?

Morton also recounts the true tale of a Bishop who, during a solemn ordination service, leaned forward and playfully tweaked a woman's hair as she was about to be ordained.⁶³ The image was clear: she was seen as a little girl, not a sophisticated, mature woman.

Images shape our spiritual understandings too. Feminists are painfully aware of the toll that patriarchal images and patriarchal spirituality have taken on women. In Beyond God the Father, Mary Daly discusses the role of Christian images and myths in oppressing women. The image of feminine evil (starting with Eve, labeled the "seductress") has been the most destructive for women,

⁶² Recounted by Morton to author and students from the School of Theology, Claremont, CA, 1984.

⁶³ Morton, The Journey is Home, 21.

not only spiritually but also politically.⁶⁴ Daly plays with images in all of her works, reworking and resignifying negative images, reclaiming them as positive ones. An example is her use of "spinster," a derogatory word used today to mean an unwed, older (old being defined by men) woman. For Daly, a spinster is, as its original meaning declared, a woman who spins. Daly imbues the word with further meaning: a spinster through her spinning participates in the sacred act of Creation; she spins Being into existence.⁶⁵ Daly has transformed a negative image into a psychologically and spiritually positive, sacred one.

Feminists such as Morton, Daly, Russell and Ruether point out that patriarchal images have silenced women, keeping them from drawing on their own experience, from developing their own images, and from allowing themselves power and freedom. The central perpetrator of this silencing has been the image of God the Father. The hardening of what was once a strong family metaphor into a static image has caused the spiritual and political oppression of women to be seen as justifiable.⁶⁶ Men have been equated with God, women with a lower nature. Men have been seen as connected to spirit, women to flesh. The

⁶⁴ Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 386, 393.

⁶⁶ See Sallie McFague, Metaphorical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 145-152.

images of feminine evil and of a male God have led to this equation: men, created in God's image, are to rule over women, the source of evil through Eve.⁶⁷ Thus these spiritual images have also led to the social and political oppression of women.

Liberation requires the exorcism of damaging images such as these. It requires the creation of powerful, new, healing and creative images. Morton elegantly describes how metaphor can function to accomplish both these functions of exorcism and re-creation.⁶⁸ Images are deeply internalized. They are not easily removed. Even feminists working consciously to erase patriarchal images find it a struggle. Morton states, "My chief concern has been to deal ruthlessly with ways I myself have internalized patriarchal images. . . ."⁶⁹

To exorcise old, destructive images, a new metaphor that shocks must be used to shatter the old. An example occurred in theology when Black theologians taught white theologians about their prejudicial images. This teaching was accomplished by creating a new image: "God is Black," Black theologians announced.⁷⁰ Black God shatters the old image of white God. Functioning in the same manner,

⁶⁷ See especially Daly, Beyond God the Father.

⁶⁸ Morton, The Journey is Home, 152.

⁶⁹ Morton, The Journey is Home, 152.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

the new metaphor, Goddess, serves to shatter these patriarchal images. To see God as Goddess is to destroy the image of a superior male person. It wipes out many conceptions of who God is and introduces a whole new set of possibilities of who God might be.

The metaphor thus helps us journey on to wholeness. For only with the shattering of the old is true transformation and re-creation possible. The second function of metaphor, therefore, is to create a new reality. Morton shares that:

The Goddess shattered the image of myself as a dependent person and cleared my brain so I could come into the power that was mine, that was me all along. . .⁷¹

and that:

The Goddess ushered in a reality that respects the sacredness of my existence . . . I renew my responsibility to the world.⁷²

A new reality comes into being: women are images of God, are powerful, can be independent and mature. When women accept such an image as Goddess, they no longer allow

⁷¹ Ibid., 166.

⁷² Morton's understanding of the role of Goddess fosters an important discussion about what to call God/Goddess. Ibid., 165. Feminists differ in their solutions to this issue. I have chosen to use the term God in this work for many reasons. I dislike the ending "-ess" on any noun (prophet-ess, author-ess, poet-ess, deacon-ess, etc.) because the image it brings up is of a person of lesser importance (as a result of society's patriarchal values). God, for all its patriarchal overlays, is a more neutral term. Goddess is, however, very valuable for shattering the male God image. Goddess should be used when it will foster growth and healing.

themselves to be silent or invisible. This new visibility can lead to a rewriting of history in which women are not only included, but history is actually seen through their eyes and through their experiences of pain. Theoretical fields, such as theology, psychology and sociology, are similarly re-thought and re-created (as we will see in Chapters 3 and 4). In this way, metaphor can lead to the creation of new spiritualities, new social roles, and new political structures.⁷³

We can now isolate some characteristics of images. Images precede thought, often operating very powerfully at an unconscious level on feelings and perceptions. Dominant cultural images can and often do support oppression and silence the oppressed. New, transformative images shatter the old, bringing new ideas and new realities. These images grow out of the experiences of the oppressed group. They are often particular to the oppressed group. These new images are frequently violently opposed by those in power, yet they are necessary to the whole of society to bring about creative, healthy transformation. The development of transformative images is an essential feature of liberation.

Biblical Hermeneutics

James A. Sanders, in probing underlying hermeneutics used by the writers of the biblical canon to interpret

⁷³ Ibid., 169.

God's actions in older texts, posits that there are two central hermeneutical axioms. God is Creator and God is Redeemer.⁷⁴ We have seen that a hermeneutic of anticipation grew out of an understanding of God as free Creator of new realities. The theological understanding of God as Redeemer helps us to see other underlying hermeneutics in the canon. Sanders labels one of these hermeneutics God's "divine bias for the weak and dispossessed."⁷⁵ Sanders describes how the historical and geographical location of ancient Israel often led its people to experience war, devastation and slavery. In this context, "the Bible largely presents a point of view on life 'from down under'."⁷⁶ God has a "tendency to identify throughout the Bible with the poor and powerless."⁷⁷ This happens because, while all humans are sinful and forgetful of God's gifts, the rich and powerful who have received more of these gifts have a greater temptation to sin and be forgetful.⁷⁸ God has identified with the victims of these sinful acts. The height of this identification with the poor and powerless was when God

⁷⁴ Sanders, Canon and Community, 48.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 56

mounted the cross of one whose life had been crushed between the zealots and the establishment. He identified with . . . the victim who loved them both.⁷⁹

This image is shatteringly, creatively powerful.

Women's experience of painful, oppressive images sharpen our comprehension of God's identification with the weakest and most oppressed people. This meeting of women's experience and biblical images guide us to choose a hermeneutic of God's bias for the poor and the powerless. The powerless often have been, and continue to be, women.

Latin American theologians have announced that God has a preferential option for the poor and oppressed.

Gutierrez points out that the book of Proverbs says that the one "who sneers at the poor insults his maker"

(Proverbs 17:5).⁸⁰ In other words, "to love Yahweh is to do justice to the poor and oppressed."⁸¹ The theological notion of a profound bond, even identification between God and neighbor, is developed ever more deeply as the biblical story unfolds.⁸² It is further "changed, deepened, and universalized by the Incarnation of the Word."⁸³ God's identification with humankind is an identification with the weak and the powerless.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Gutierrez, 194.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 190-203.

⁸³ Ibid., 196.

Nevertheless, liberation scholars seem sometimes to forget that the poor and oppressed include women, who constitute a majority in these groups.⁸⁴ When we state that God has a bias for the oppressed, we must image the oppressed as women. What happens when we say, therefore, that God has a bias for oppressed women? A new image is created, shattering old ones, creating a new reality.

Problems arise in the use of this hermeneutic of God's divine bias for oppressed women. God may not seem to be on the side of the poor, much less women, at all times.⁸⁵ The Bible often neglects this identification.

Ruether states:

The prophetic tradition in the Bible is never applied explicitly to the critique of the bondage of women under patriarchy, although there are some hints of it in the New Testament.⁸⁶

Fiorenza also points out that there is no explicit feminist principle or tradition in the Bible.⁸⁷ Yet many women's experience tells them that God desires their wholeness and freedom. The Bible yields powerful images of God's identification with the powerless. Women know that they are often powerless. Therefore a hermeneutic of God's

⁸⁴ Women, for example, own a very small percentage of the world's property. In the United States, women constitute two-thirds of those living below the poverty line. See Chapter 3 in this work.

⁸⁵ Ruether, Women-Church, 41.

⁸⁶ Ibid. There are hints in the Old Testament also.

⁸⁷ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, xv, xxi.

bias for oppressed women is not far-fetched in biblical interpretation.

Sanders suggests that we cannot absolutize some hermeneutics.⁸⁸ These hermeneutics may not be applicable in some parts of the canon.⁸⁹ The hermeneutic of God's bias for oppressed women may also not always apply. For this reason, other hermeneutics must also be employed, such as a hermeneutic of anticipation and a hermeneutic of suspicion. However, we must begin to see the ways in which God identifies with women too, both in the text and in our lives.

Educational Methodology

Educators must become aware of the central role images play in shaping our inner and outer lives. They are an essential component of what educates us. Morton's The Journey is Home establishes once and for all the principle that images are at the heart of education. She does not mince words:

We have been taught that education is a matter of intellectual pursuit and have given little attention to the images that are projected in our educational materials, our methods of teaching, and the teachers as models⁹⁰

Images . . . are the powerful instruments of patriarchy and are kept alive by those of us who have not yet broken out of a patriarchal mind-set.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Sanders, Canon and Community, 53, 54.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹⁰ Morton, The Journey is Home, 110.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

She calls for an "apocalyptic model" of education, one which brings about the "discontinuity of the old hierarchical ordering," and the creation of a new society which faithfully humanizes and politicizes every person.⁹²

Essential to such education is what might be called an educational methodology of prophetic imagination. The term prophetic imagination is employed by Walter Brueggemann to describe the work of the prophets.⁹³ The prophetic task was disruptive education for justice.⁹⁴ Prophets utilized poetic tools to disrupt the human power structures with visions of God's caring. Prophetic metaphor and images confronted the people with the reality of injustice and with the hope for justice.⁹⁵

An educational methodology of prophetic imagination can be divided into two parts: content and process. The division is somewhat artificial. Educators since Dewey have realized that process becomes part of the content of educational experiences. Brueggemann states, "Shape and process, how and what, substance and method are bound together."⁹⁶ It can be helpful to separate them for the

⁹² Ibid., 117.

⁹³ Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

⁹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, The Creative Word (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 44ff.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 10.

purpose of analysis, but the unity is important to remember.

The content of an educational methodology of prophetic imagination consists of image and metaphor. A pool of metaphors can be discovered, created, and resignified by the students and teachers. Biblical texts and traditions are a central source of metaphors and images. Reflection on these could clarify their effect on women and on society. One way to reflect on the images produced by biblical texts is to collect stories, poetry, and art reproductions that focus on biblical themes. Images may be found in those that are both destructive and constructive, judging by the experiences of women. Guidelines for discarding, resignifying or reclaiming old metaphors and images must be developed by the study group. New, transformative metaphors could also be created. Transformative metaphors about God, self, and society would grow out of the experience of the students, informed by the biblical texts.

Imagination is the essential ingredient for the development of new metaphors, and for the study of old ones. Brueggemann affirms that "the imagination must come before the implementation."⁹⁷ The prophets employed poetry as their educational content. Brueggemann avers that "poetic imagination is the last way left in which to

⁹⁷ Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 45.

challenge and conflict the dominant reality."⁹⁸ The role of the images of the dominant, oppressive culture (which he calls the royal consciousness and which women would label patriarchy) is to produce numbness to death.⁹⁹ Prophetic imagination challenges the dominant cultural myth and images, and breaks the numbness and silence. It accomplishes this in two ways: it laments and it energizes. Put in feminist terms, the poetry of lamentation and grief makes visible the suffering of oppressed women. It exorcises silence and old, oppressive images. Poetry of amazement energizes and creates new visions. It reworks and reclaims symbols so that they can shatter old realities and despair, and create new realities and hope.¹⁰⁰ The content of an education of prophetic imagination, in sum, is poetry of grief and of hope.

One difference between Morton and Brueggemann is that Morton allows for the possibility of creating wholly new symbols and images. Brueggemann, on the other hand, states that we cannot invent new symbols.

Rather [we must] move back into the deepest memories of this community and activate those very symbols that have always been the basis for contradicting the regnant consciousness.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 62-79.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 66.

Morton would not dispute the fact that it is very difficult to invent new symbols consciously. However, she calls on women to do just that. Symbols can sometimes be created anew, or they can be old memories reworked.¹⁰² What is important is to employ an educational method that develops a prophetic imagination. The content of this pedagogy is metaphor and prophetic poetry.

The process of such a pedagogy is consciously apocalyptic. The roles of teachers and students must be reexamined. Educators must identify the images being created by their educational actions and roles. Morton states that the apocalyptic model

implies a new kind of role for the teacher who may listen as much as speak; who may learn from the student--even the least--and is always refreshed as one after the other comes to a new sense of identity and self-worth while moving toward the new society.¹⁰³

An apocalyptic methodology of prophetic imagination calls for an awareness of the images conveyed in educational actions, curriculum, and environment. This methodology becomes a new image itself for education. It shatters old images of education. A hierarchical educational process and a conceptual educational content are replaced by a pedagogy centered on equality and images. Such a pedagogy may initiate change towards a whole, just society.

¹⁰² Morton, The Journey is Home, 119, 170ff.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 117.

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness is a central element of liberation. Critical consciousness is a new knowing involving the whole person; it is a knowing through the intellect, the deepest feelings, and action and will. This knowing radically changes the behavior of the person and group. This consciousness is not only new knowledge content, it is a new way of knowing; it creates a new epistemology. Critical consciousness involves the whole thinking/feeling/acting person in a new framework of making meaning out of experience.

Critical consciousness creates a keen awareness of the social reality in which we live. Russell describes how we humans are shaped by our "social reality and the language and symbols which give it meaning."¹⁰⁴ Critical consciousness allows us to examine what has shaped us, by helping us "to become conscious of the contradictions and inconsistencies of various views of the world, including [our] own."¹⁰⁵ Her understanding of critical consciousness is similar to Freire's. Freire believes that the simplest, poorest, most humble person is able, given the proper tools, to "perceive his [sic] personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his own perception of

¹⁰⁴ Letty Russell, Growth in Partnership, 75.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

that reality, and deal critically with it."¹⁰⁶

This act of critical consciousness is not simply an act of the mind, though it is based in reflection by the oppressed on their situation. Freire states strongly that humans will be more human "the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it."¹⁰⁷ He explains that "action and reflection occur simultaneously. . . . Critical reflection is also action."¹⁰⁸

Morton also affirms this truth. She speaks of the "dynamic energy that emerges when action and reflection "mesh."

That moment of meshing is action of the most transforming sort. The person is no longer an isolated being but a responsible social self . . . and has brought about the process of transforming self and society at one and the same time.¹⁰⁹

Daly's work reinforces this reality of unity of thought and action. She states:

The foreground fathers offer dual decoys labeled "thought" and "action," which distract from the reality both of deep knowing and of external action. There is no authentic separation possible.¹¹⁰

Critical consciousness is deep knowing and external action, unseparated, in unity.

¹⁰⁶ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 13.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 123.

¹⁰⁹ Morton, The Journey is Home, 112.

¹¹⁰ Daly, Gyn/Ecology, 6.

The first action of critical consciousness is demystification or demythologizing. We have mentioned that the oppressed live in silence, invisible to the powers of the world and often unaware of their own situation. To recognize the reality of one's own oppression and the factors causing this situation leads to a dramatic awakening. As Daily attests, it is an exorcism,

a peeling off the layers of mindbindings and cosmetics . . . , [a] movement past the patriarchally imposed sense of reality and identity. This demystification process, amazing The Lies, is ecstasy.¹¹¹

Daly describes four methods used to "mystify" women. These are "erasure," "reversal," "false polarization," "divide and conquer."¹¹² Through these methods, women have been murdered, blamed for evil, discredited, and set against each other. These actions are given rational justification in the images and myths supported by the dominant, oppressive culture. Critical consciousness is naming, that is identifying, these myths, images and methods, and acting to reject them.

Paolo Freire also has a list of actions that, supported by the regnant mythology, serve to oppress the poor. Acts of conquest, of divide and rule, or manipulation, and of cultural invasion, are taken in the name of a "mythologized" reality which allows the poor to be treated

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 8.

as things.¹¹³ We will look at Freire's thought more closely in the next chapter. Let us note here that critical consciousness unmasks these actions and names the ideology and mythologized reality behind them.

In this first phase of critical consciousness, all areas of life need to be unmasked and demystified. An awareness of the contradictions between mythologized reality and the true reality develops. The actual social, economic, political, and spiritual reality in which the oppressed live contradicts the reality described in the dominant, cultural mythology.¹¹⁴ Many areas of life must be reflected upon in order to unmask their role in continuing oppression. Theology, social roles, economic systems, historical accounts, political and cultural systems--all are important areas for reflection and action. One's own beliefs and ideas must also be looked at critically. Christianity and the church are not exempt from the reflection and action process. Gutierrez makes this point clearly:

The scope and gravity of the process of liberation is such that to ponder its significance is really to examine the meaning of Christianity itself and the mission of the Church in the world.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 45, 119-167.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹¹⁵ Gutierrez, 143.

Each wave of liberation reveals new areas of oppression which were made invisible by the oppressive mythologies. The reality of poverty based on class-differentiated economic systems was not at first linked with racism. The uncovering of the realities of racism did not immediately make evident the reality of the oppression of women. The unmasking of patriarchy is often not connected, even at this time, with class and race oppression. Yet these are related oppressions, covered up by myth and ideology. The oppressed are like fish in water: unaware of the reality of the water within and without them. To discover that water, especially when it is a reality that is oppressive, is the unmasking work of critical consciousness. This work is difficult, threatening, and always in process.

The work of discovering the water involves naming the actual realities experienced by the oppressed. Acknowledging the validity of their own experiences is the first step in the unmasking process of critical consciousness. The second step in this unmasking process is to uncover and name the forces that have kept the oppressed from truly acknowledging their own experiences. When the oppressed name the myths, images, and social roles that have kept reality hidden, they are engaged in finding new meaning and power in their experience. They, rather than those in power, become the interpreters of reality. The power of

the oppressors, which has been reinforced by the mythologized reality, is weakened.

With these acts of naming and interpretation, the oppressed find themselves understanding knowledge--what and how they know--in a new way. Their questions and world view undergo a dramatic shift. An example of this change is the way in which feminists see dualisms. Dualisms are often accepted as truisms in current Western thought. We have seen that thought and action have been, as far as Freire, Morton, and Daly are concerned, unnecessarily separated. Feminists are also concerned about the separation of the world into male/female, spirit/flesh, mind/body, black/white, thinking/feeling. The acceptance of such dualisms are seen by these liberation scholars as part of an intellectual system that is oppressive. A new world view that refuses to accept these dualisms is necessary for liberation.

Thus, through the acts of naming, interpreting, and creating a new world view, critical consciousness changes reality. To name reality as it truly is, is to speak a true word.¹¹⁶ Freire puts it this way: "To speak a true word is to transform the world."¹¹⁷ Daly, meditating on the consequences of unmasking patriarchy, states, "Overcoming the silencing of women is an extreme act, a sequence

¹¹⁶ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 75.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

of extreme acts."¹¹⁸ This radical act of feminist consciousness "spirals in all directions, discovering the past, creating/disclosing the present/future."¹¹⁹ To name reality is to destroy contemporary idols¹²⁰ and allow the truth to be free.

We can see that the second work of critical consciousness is to name/create new reality. The work of unmasking and demystification is part of the journey from oppression. The work of naming and creating is part of the journey to a new reality. With a new world view, naming one's self and one's world becomes possible. For women, naming is "Yes-saying" to themselves.¹²¹ This naming is an acknowledgment of the validity of each woman's experience and of the wholeness of her being. Women learn that it is "no longer appropriate to allow men to define their lives."¹²² They "come to see that the gift of themselves is precious, sacred, with unique potential."¹²³ Whoever the oppressed are, reality is transformed when they take control of their own identify and their own way of knowing.

¹¹⁸ Daly, Gyn/Ecology, 21.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹²⁰ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 66.

¹²¹ Daly, Gyn/Ecology, xii.

¹²² Morton, The Journey is Home, 18.

¹²³ Ibid.

The radical shift in perspective brought by critical consciousness can create new theologies, new relationships, and new political systems.¹²⁴ God is not then seen as one who wills such suffering, but instead sides with those who suffer. The oppressed, in this case women, claim the imago dei for themselves.¹²⁵ Theology is forced to include "new interpretations of sin, new understandings of repentance, and new experiences of salvation."¹²⁶ Theological thought changes slowly, however, as do human beings. Many male and female theologians are unwilling to wrestle with the feminist challenge. Many women are unwilling, or unable, to see themselves as images of God.

Relationships likewise can change radically. Divide and conquer loses much of its power; new love and solidarity is created. The new community that is formed can act to drastically redefine social roles and cultural expectations; and, since self and society are so meshed, political systems are affected and changed. The oppressed choose to have choices rather than prescriptions, to speak out rather than be silenced.¹²⁷ Women, for example, are beginning to refuse to continue to be exploited labor, to participate in the rape of the earth and its peoples, to

¹²⁴ Letty Russell, Growth in Partnership, 18.

¹²⁵ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 19.

¹²⁶ Morton, The Journey is Home, 9.

¹²⁷ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 33.

lose control of their bodies. In addition, through critical consciousness, history is being rewritten. New sets of questions are being posed; those who have been made invisible are being made visible.

Radical transformation and wholeness is the goal of critical consciousness. This goal is being formed slowly, sometimes awkwardly. Oppressive thinking and behavior is institutionalized by societies and internalized by individuals. The imperfection of humans and their institutions, which theologians call sin, impedes the transformative task. Our work is to celebrate transformation as it occurs. It is the work of God-with-us.

Critical consciousness, in sum, is reflection and action by the whole person. Its tool is language. Language is shaped by images and in turn creates images. Functioning in the same pattern as transformative images, critical consciousness involves exorcism in the form of uncovering and demystifying reality. It involves creation through speaking a true word. It opens the door to a new reality.

Biblical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutical principles, even those drawn from the biblical text, are not free of cultural ideology. As Sanders points out, the bias of the scholars shapes the questions asked when they approach the text.¹²⁸ These

¹²⁸ Sanders, God Has a Story Too, 11.

biases guide which principles they see in the text. They also help blind them to other principles.

Latin American theologians have been central in demonstrating the Western, North-Atlantic, white cultural assumptions of traditional theologians and their hermeneutics. In order to look at a biblical text afresh so that it can speak to the Latin American experience, the theologians have reformulated hermeneutics.

The basis of their hermeneutics, according to Juan Luis Segundo in The Liberation of Theology, is the suspicion that

anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, is intimately bound up with the existing social situation in at least an unconscious way.¹²⁹

Out of this suspicion grow the four steps of Segundo's hermeneutical circle. First, the oppressed unmask their oppressive reality and name the ideologies that hid it. They become suspicious of any ideology that might mask reality. The second step is for them to apply this suspicion "to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular."¹³⁰ This step allows for the third one, which is a "new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical

¹²⁹ Juan Luis Segundo, The Liberation of Theology (New York: Orbis, 1976), 8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

suspicion."¹³¹ The suspicion is that the "prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account."¹³² The prevailing interpretation of the Bible is suspected of having supported the oppressor by claiming to have universal applicability. Yet this interpretation has not addressed the community of the oppressed.¹³³

As a result of these three steps, applying the newly-created suspicion to theology and biblical interpretation, the oppressed find a new hermeneutic, a "new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith [i.e., Scripture] with the new elements at our disposal."¹³⁴ Segundo quotes Black theologian James Cone to demonstrate this fourth step. Cone states:

If I read the New Testament correctly, the resurrection of Christ means that he is also present today in the midst of all societies affecting his liberation of the oppressed. . . . As a black theologian I want to know what God's revelation means right now as the black community participates in the struggle for liberation.¹³⁵

The idea of applying the suspicion that comes with critical consciousness to the study of the Bible is found in the thought of feminist theologians, exemplified by

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 31.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Two aspects of feminist liberation hermeneutics are important here. First, prevailing interpretations of the Bible are indeed to be viewed with suspicion. As with all liberation theologies, feminists must recognize that "all theology, willingly or not, is by definition always engaged for or against the oppressed."¹³⁶ As we have seen in Segundo's work, theology is a system of ideas that can be used to mask reality. Often, therefore, theology (including biblical interpretation) has been a tool of the oppressor.

Feminists take a second step beyond other, usually male, liberation theologians. These latter maintain that once biblical interpretations that support oppression are stripped away, one can return to the original text and find support for liberation. Even when all texts are not supportive of liberation, some texts exist that speak to the particular oppressed community about God's identification with the oppressed.¹³⁷ Many feminists, however, believe that God's identification with oppressed women is not so clear. They point out that the Bible is a book written by men. Fiorenza states:

A feminist hermeneutic cannot trust or accept Bible and tradition simply as divine revelation. Rather it must critically evaluate them as patriarchal articulations since [the

¹³⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her (New York: Crossroads, 1983), 6.

¹³⁷ Segundo, 33.

recognition] that biblical texts are not the words of God but the words of men.¹³⁸

At the same time, feminists maintain that patriarchy is against God's will.¹³⁹ This belief allows them to dialogue with biblical texts as possible sources of liberating paradigms, even when they do not directly speak to women's oppression and liberation.

The ways in which the Bible can be actively liberating for women will be discussed later. Critical consciousness proves that we must first approach the biblical texts with a hermeneutic of suspicion. Experience teaches us also to study the interpretations of the texts with a hermeneutic of suspicion. This hermeneutic of suspicion is supported by some biblical wisdom, also. The prophets often warn against false understandings of God. The people are cautioned to be suspicious in the New Testament:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; . . . let us love one another for love is of God (1 John 4:1, 7).

The reality in which women live, a reality in part created by biblical interpretations and texts, has often not been experienced by women as loving. The God who sides with women has been hidden from them by patriarchal interpretations. Biblical texts promoting the subjugation of women have kept women from naming themselves as fully

¹³⁸ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, x-xi.

¹³⁹ Ruether, Women-Church, 57.

human. A hermeneutic of suspicion helps to unmask and uproot the biblical source of oppression for women and other oppressed groups. It helps women to differentiate between the false God who promotes their oppression and the one God, the God who desires women's wholeness and freedom.

Educational Methodology

Paolo Freire has proposed a praxis model of education for the oppressed.¹⁴⁰ We will be looking at his work in detail in the next chapter. Therefore, I will simply point out the central features of his methodology and its relevance for us at this point.

Freire's goal is for learners and teachers to develop together active/reflective critical consciousness, to help them move toward greater freedom of choice. His methodology models a problem-posing, dialogic investigation of the reality in which the oppressed live. Learners participate in investigating the reality in which they live. They pose as problems the contradictions between the reality they experience and the reality said to exist by cultural, oppressive mythologies. They develop power by becoming conscious of their own consciousness.

The content of Freire's praxis education is, as we have seen, the examination of the situation in which the oppressed live, the reality that cultural ideologies say exists, and the contradictions between these two realities.

¹⁴⁰ Freire, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

The process is the participatory dialogue of the learner with the teacher and with the problems of the world. Together, teacher and learner create knowledge--knowledge of reality, knowledge of new possibilities. This process is, as in critical consciousness, both reflection and action. Through the act of critical consciousness, reality is reflected/acted upon and changed. Those without choices learn that they have choices. They are able to make critical choices that contribute to their own spiritual, psychological, social and political freedom.

Problem-posing, dialogical, praxis education aids the learner to develop critical consciousness on the liberation journey. Combined with a hermeneutic of suspicion, this methodology helps the learner encounter the Bible critically. These tools of critical consciousness are essential if biblical education is to be liberating.

Liberative Community

A fourth, central element of liberation has many names: bonding, partnership, new relationships, community, solidarity, woman-church, connectedness. This feature of connectedness and community is very important for those journeying toward freedom. The oppressed that truly travel the freedom road quickly become aware that "no one is free until all are free."¹⁴¹ None of the other elements of

¹⁴¹ Letty Russell, Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective, 43.

liberation take place in isolation; the journey, transformative images, and critical consciousness all require community. Although the individual experiences these elements of liberation, they are less accessible to a solitary individual. They can also be misunderstood if the community is not included.¹⁴²

The importance of community is underscored by biblical theology concerning the journey from sin to salvation. Gutierrez points out that Paul, in Gal. 5:1, refers to liberation from sin as freedom from a selfish turning in upon oneself. To sin "is to refuse to love one's neighbors and, therefore, the Lord himself."¹⁴³ Freedom from sin, he continues, is freedom to love. He concludes: "The fullness of liberation--a free gift from Christ--is communion with God and with other men."¹⁴⁴

Therefore, to struggle for one's own liberation is to turn from working only for oneself to working with others in community. Community is a group of connected individuals who are working together with caring and love for the positive transformation of themselves and society. A community will usually reflect many of the problems, tensions, and disagreements of the larger society. At the

¹⁴² Morton, The Journey is Home, 25-29. She tells the stories of isolated individuals, Samuel Beckett and Antonin Artaud, who struggled for new liberating images, and the pain they experienced.

¹⁴³ Gutierrez, 35.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 36.

same time members of a community are more tightly connected than in the larger society. The fabric of community is woven of acceptance and care for the others in the group and is set on the woof of a common goal.

Not all communities are liberating, however. A community can stifle dissent, disagreement, and conflict which might lead to change. It can promote ideologies and values that continue to empower the powerful and oppress the powerless, even as care and affection are demonstrated. Liberative community gives strength for the radical journey of liberation. It nurtures transformative images and critical consciousness in a context of care and acceptance.

To work in liberative community, therefore, is to undermine the oppressors' strategy of divide and conquer. Liberative community helps one turn from the sin of excessive individualism and separation.¹⁴⁵ Liberation is the struggle for freedom with others. Struggling with others counters the struggle for others, which is an oppressive, paternalistic action. In the work on the task of liberation, Freire states, "one cannot speak of an actor, nor simply of actors, but rather of actors in intercommunication.¹⁴⁶ Russell also describes the centrality of community in theological terms. She points out that in the book of Ephesians the goal is not maturity as an individual

¹⁴⁵ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 137.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 123.

quest. Rather it is the development of the whole church as a partnership in the body of Christ.¹⁴⁷ She describes partnership as "a new focus of relationship in which there is continuing commitment and common struggle in interaction with a wider community context."¹⁴⁸ Partnership is Russell's key metaphor to describe the liberation journey of humans: partnership with each other and with God. Without partnership liberation cannot be true liberation. She reminds us:

Whatever gains women have made, they are only partial unless society and culture is restructured so that others have the same equal access to these changes, be they economic, political, social, or private.¹⁴⁹

Rosemary Radford Ruether also sees liberative community as essential to turning from sin toward wholeness. This turning is a conversion, a metanoia, from an old sinful "counter-reality" of "distorted relationships, translated into power tools of exploitation."¹⁵⁰ The turning is away from a community which continues separation and exclusiveness. It is a conversion to "an alternative upon which we base ourselves in order to wage a cultural and social struggle against this counterreality."¹⁵¹ This

¹⁴⁷ Letty Russell, Growth in Partnership, 55.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁹ Letty Russell, Human Liberation, 43.

¹⁵⁰ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 164.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

alternative base is found in liberative community. She states that "one needs communities of nurture to guide one through death to the old symbolic order of patriarchy to rebirth into a new community of being and living."¹⁵² Ruether has done extensive work upon the nature of liberative community, "women-church," its nature and praxis.¹⁵³

Much of Mary Daly's work also speaks of the freeing power of liberative community, of sisterhood. She sees community as a rejection of sin, of the sin of patriarchy which impedes females bonding.¹⁵⁴ She recognizes that women have been treated as a caste. In this common experience of oppression, women can discover their pain and anger, and put these feelings to work to free themselves. The rejection of the sin embodied in the old painful realities always comes about in community, the community of "movers, spinners, weavers."¹⁵⁵

This rejection produces energy and joy. It leads to new creation. In Daly's vision of community, joy and energy are central characteristics. They are the opposite of the old sinful realities of numbness (anaesthesia) and passivity. In the community of Spinsters, these forces of

¹⁵² Ruether, Women-Church, 3.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Mary Daly, Pure Lust (Boston: Beacon, 1984), xii.

¹⁵⁵ Daly, Gyn/Ecology, xiv, for example.

death are exorcised and commitment to Being is formed.

"Yes-saying to ourselves" becomes a joyful, energetic reality.

Thus liberative community is seen as a conversion from the oppressive sin of wrong relationships, excessive individualism, numbness, and passivity. Liberative community is not only the result of conversion from sin, it is also the very way of salvation. Morton declares strongly that community makes possible the deliverance.¹⁵⁶ In community women have shared their stories and been heard. They know that "they have experienced together a common hell and have been delivered from it. They know themselves as new women."¹⁵⁷ Her description of the process by which women have been "heard into speech" is helpful.

Women came to new speech simply because they were being heard. Hearing became an act of receiving the woman as well as the words she was speaking. In receiving the speaker (who had touched the quick of their own existence) the women heard the speaker speak for them to the extent that they, in turn, were able to receive themselves. . . . A communal process of theologizing was experienced.¹⁵⁸

Women are heard into speech and thus into new life in liberative community. In liberative community, women and other oppressed people discover energy and power in the experience of not being alone in their pain and

¹⁵⁶ Morton, The Journey is Home, 29-30.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 18.

rage.¹⁵⁹ They are heard into being. Together they work on transformation through the discovery of new images and a critical consciousness. In community, women "live the new reality now."¹⁶⁰

Indeed, the liberative community is itself a new, transformative image and an act of critical consciousness. It makes visible the truth that the struggle for freedom must be done with others who struggle for freedom. In liberative community the oppressed experience deeply the reality that their own liberation is only partial until all others find liberation. They become sensitive to the pain of other oppressed peoples, knowing that, even in their differences, oppressed peoples experience much common pain.

They experience the joy, too, in this new community, of the possibilities and realities of being accepted as fully human, of being, for a while, free. For in liberative community, new images, new language, new rituals are utilized. Roles and social structures are being transformed. In liberative community full humanity is redefined and experienced. Although these processes are never perfect, reality begins to be radically changed. The community is the cradle for action-reflection, for praxis. Because individuals turn to each other, it becomes the

¹⁵⁹ The Christian base communities of Latin America are good examples. See, for example, Ruether, Women-Church, 24-30.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

locus for encountering God.

For, finally, liberative community is the place in which God's work and God's presence are most visible. It is a place in which "two or three are gathered" in God's name. For God's name is love; God's work is justice. God's righteousness is sought and found (Matthew 6:33), at least in part, in liberative community. Enspirited by God, the community itself becomes the "pillar of cloud by day" and the "pillar of fire by night" in the Exodus journey of freedom.

Biblical Hermeneutics

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza will be our guide here as we work to discern the biblical hermeneutics suggested by the experience of liberative community. The liberative community assumed in this discussion is a feminist community. Since we will be looking at her thought in more depth in Chapter 4, we will briefly describe only the suggestions which apply here.

In her helpful volume, Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation, Fiorenza describes four hermeneutics that are part of a feminist interpretive model of the Bible. Two of these hermeneutics speak to the intersection of the community aspect of liberation with the biblical community's own interpretive principles. We must again stress that both communities contribute to this choice of hermeneutics. Although Fiorenza places the liberative community of women-church as a primary

determiner of hermeneutics,¹⁶¹ the two hermeneutics chosen for this particular intersection also reflect interpretive principles used by the Bible itself. The stress on the influence of both communities--the biblical community of the text and the contemporary liberative community--keeps the biases of scholarship from being hidden (see Chapter 4).

Fiorenza develops the concept of a hermeneutic of remembrance and a hermeneutic of creative actualization. A hermeneutic of remembrance is the reclaiming of the sufferings, struggles, and hopes of women's foremothers.¹⁶² It is a dangerous memory, a subversive memory. Fiorenza proposes doing more than simply digging out of the Bible the memories of women, their stories and struggles. She proposes "theoretical models for historical reconstructions that place women in the center of Biblical community and theology."¹⁶³

Her work, In Memory of Her, is an example of such historical reconstruction. In this book she has carefully and thoughtfully demonstrated that women can "reclaim early Christian theology and history as our own theology and history." Through remembering and critically reconstructing the history of women in the early church, she has demonstrated the way the interpretive principles of traditional

¹⁶¹ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, xiv-xvii.

¹⁶² Ibid., 19.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 20.

church history have allowed women to be invisible. Such history thus has not only been inaccurate, it has been a tool of oppression. To remember and reconstruct the history of women as part of a "discipleship of equals" is to create new theoretical models of study. Such an act is subversive, creating a new epistemology. The liberative community of the past is remembered and known by the liberative community of the present in a new way.¹⁶⁴ Such knowing subverts current epistemologies.

This hermeneutic of remembrance is not very different from some of the ways in which the Israelite communities remembered their own past stories of struggle and hope, such as the Exodus story. Certainly there are quite a few examples in which such remembrances became "dangerous memories," giving hope to the oppressed Israelites through a different way of knowing and understanding history. A hermeneutic of remembrance is a source of transformative power because it engenders solidarity and hope.

The second hermeneutic proposed by Fiorenza that is natural to our intersection here is the hermeneutic of creative actualization. This hermeneutic is the reclaiming of imagination and sacred powers of women in order to "dream new dreams and see new visions."¹⁶⁵ To employ a

¹⁶⁴ This process is similar to Sanders' proposal of the use of "dynamic analogy." See Canon and Community, xviii. Chapter 4 of this work also points out some differences between Sanders and Fiorenza.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

hermeneutic of creative actualization is to "enter the biblical story with the help of historical imagination, artistic re-creation, and liturgical ritualization."¹⁶⁶ This hermeneutic allows one to retell the biblical stories from a feminist point of view, to "create narrative amplifications of the feminist remnants that have survived in patriarchal texts."¹⁶⁷ It allows a "process of creative re-vision" in which literary creativity, music and dance are employed.¹⁶⁸ In this manner, says Fiorenza, we not only spin tales about the voyages of Prisca, the missionary, or about Junia, the apostle, but also dance Sarah's circle and experience prophetic enthusiasm.¹⁶⁹

These acts of interpretation are not dissimilar to the way the church through the centuries has "inspired artistic creativity and legendary embellishments." Midrashim and apocryphal writings, liturgies and sacred hymns, all have been outgrowths of a hermeneutics of creative actualization.¹⁷⁰

A hermeneutic of creative actualization, based on a hermeneutic of remembrance, allows for the liberative community of the present to participate in the biblical text in a meaningful manner. These hermeneutics allow for

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

both sources of revelation, the liberating Bible and the liberative community, to truly speak to each other. Such a dialogue makes accessible the radical, liberating journey.

Educational Methodology

Walter Brueggemann points out that the canonical process by which the Torah was formed reveals the educational process central to the creation of the community of Israel.¹⁷¹ The Torah reveals a "mode of knowing," a process and a content, each one of which became part of an educational methodology that created community. That community of Israel, in its origins, was a subversive community, a group of rabble in search of freedom.¹⁷²

The Torah demonstrates a mode of knowing that Brueggemann calls "narrative," and a process he labels "story." Story represents the consensus of the community about who it is and what it believes. It is the place one "comes home to."¹⁷³ Through an educational process of question and answer, the story is told to the young. They learn the answer to the question "who are we." They learn where home is. They learn, also, that "every time Israel tells one of its stories, it means an assault on and refutation of another one."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Brueggemann, The Creative Word, 15.

¹⁷² Ibid., 28.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 26.

As a result, the content of story is subversive. It reveals a new act of God. This story is a disclosure of newness, of disruption and miracles. It tells of a shift in power. It celebrates "new power for 'the groaner'."¹⁷⁵ It details what is basic to the community, the freedom of God to free humans.

Brueggemann is speaking of the formation of the historical community that made the Torah its canon. Therefore all that he says does not necessarily translate directly to a modern community that is critically reevaluating the Torah. Yet, with a hermeneutics of remembrance as its mode of knowing, the liberative community of women-church is in many ways undergoing a similar process. It is through subversive story that women are heard to speech. This hearing powerfully joins them to the community of sister "groaners." The stories tell of their pain and anger. In the telling, and in the awareness of common experience finally made visible, deep connections are made. The question "who are we" begins to be answered.

The educational process of hearing the story also gives hope and power to the new community. First, it is subversive telling, for each woman-story (or story of any oppressed person) is "an assault on and a refutation of another one."¹⁷⁶ Whether the story is that of a

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 26.

contemporary woman or of a woman of the biblical community whose story is one of pain and oppression, it is always a contradiction of traditional patriarchal theology and ideology. The reality of oppression experienced by these women, not usually acknowledged, is proclaimed. This kind of storytelling brings to light that which was hidden, making visible the invisible. The process gives these stories, and their tellers, dangerous power--dangerous, that is, to those who have power and do not want any stories told but their own.

Secondly, the process of hearing story allows stories of freedom and wholeness, stories that may also have been hidden, to be revealed. Thus, for example, the story of Tamar, "righteous one" (Genesis 38), is retold. Stories of other women, such as Abigail, Martha, Junia, (etc.!) whose importance have historically been so devalued, are told for the hope they give. The bringing to light of their power gives power to the contemporary woman.

Finally, story allows for imagination and vision. Through the telling of stories, a new future is envisioned and created. The hermeneutics of creative actualization uses story as an educational tool. Story flushes out the sketchy past. It creates the possibility of what can be. Story is not only told in words, it is expressed in dance, mime, art, and drama. All of these media are important to an education of story.

The nature of story makes it an essential educational

process/content. Brueggemann points out that story is concrete, open-ended, experiential, imaginative, and seen as "the bottom line."¹⁷⁷ Thus when women's stories are heard they discover the reality of their experiences, and are heard into being. Through story, the subversive process of uncovering the hidden past and present is begun. God is revealed and hope is discovered. New possibilities for the community are created. The liberative community itself comes into existence (or is uncovered). Through story this community grows towards greater freedom.

Conclusion

Liberation is a process of transformation toward a more fully human existence, an existence in which the oppressed can take charge of their own lives and be free to engage in choices in psychological, spiritual, social and political areas. We have seen that four elements are central to the experience of liberation. The descriptions of these elements help us to understand what more fully human means. They demonstrate that liberation simultaneously engages the psychological, spiritual, social and political aspects of existence. They help us to understand the statement that the political is personal, and the personal is political.

Each characteristic of liberation has implications for biblical hermeneutics and for educational methodology. The

¹⁷⁷ Brueggemann, The Creative Word, 23-27.

biblical hermeneutics grow out of the encounter of two sets of human experience and the interpretations of these experiences. To clarify: the experiences reflected in the Bible have been given meaning by the biblical communities, using certain hermeneutical principles. The experiences of oppression and liberation by contemporary feminist communities have also been reflected on and interpreted. The meeting of these two sets of interpretations, informed by contemporary needs and goals, guide the choice of hermeneutics.¹⁷⁸

The liberation characteristic of radical journey calls for a hermeneutic of anticipation and an educational methodology of anticipation. Transformative images lead us to employ a hermeneutic of the identification of God with oppressed women. An educational method of prophetic imagination, centered on image and metaphor, is suggested. Critical consciousness begets a hermeneutic of suspicion, and an educational methodology of problem-posing, dialogical praxis. Finally, liberative community leads us to a hermeneutic of remembrance and a hermeneutic of creative

¹⁷⁸ This process has more levels of complexity. The hermeneutics which scholars perceive in the biblical texts are determined in part by the contemporary community of which they are a part. At the same time, the reflection on contemporary experience is informed and shaped by biblical understandings. Thus this intersection of two sets of experiences and reflections is really a fluid, ever-changing process. See the discussion of the educational theory of Mary Elizabeth Moore in Chapter 2 of this work.

actualization. The educational process/content is hearing women's stories.

The ways in which we could put together these four sets of implications for biblical hermeneutics and educational methodology will become clearer as our search for liberating biblical education with women progresses. These implications are simply, at this juncture, suggestions. They are guides for us to remember and utilize, if, after further reflection, they still seem appropriate. We will continue our study by examining, in the next chapter, the methods proposed for biblical education by religious educators of this century.

CHAPTER 2

Theology and Educational Methodology: A Relationship

In this chapter we will focus more closely on educational methodology. What can we learn about teaching the Bible from major religious educators? Can we find models for a pedagogy that would promote liberation? Are there ways in which past thought must be augmented or revised in order to develop a pedagogy for liberating biblical education?

The questions of what, why, how, and who will provide focus as we examine the work of different educators. What is the Bible, in the opinion of the educator? Why is it taught? How is it to be taught? Who are the learners that are involved in the pedagogy? Each of these questions is in reality a complex of questions. "What is the Bible" speaks of hermeneutics and of the nature of revelation. "Why is it taught" involves a theology of salvation and a theory of the goal of religious education. "How is it to be taught" calls up a theory of process and content in religious education. "Who are the learners" brings in psychological, sociological and educational theories of learning.

Rather than being a survey of the many answers to these questions posed in this century, this chapter will look more closely at the thought of a few, important

religious educators.¹ These educators have been selected for several reasons. The problem of teaching the Bible has been, for most of them, a central focus in their work. Each educator has also been important in the development of this field, dealing with issues that were critical in their day. They were often ground breakers, representing educational and theological positions important to their time. These scholars examine important questions that are still alive today. What is the role of biblical scholarship in biblical education? In what way does biblical interpretation, or hermeneutics, play a part in biblical education? What is the educational starting point, life experience or biblical text (or something else)? How do we pass on the (biblical) tradition while encouraging transformation? What is the role of psychology and other social sciences in biblical education? The mining of their work will yield many insights into these questions.

Starting with George Albert Coe in the early part of this century, we will proceed in chronological order through the twentieth century with the works of Sophia Fahs, James Smart, Iris Cully, Dorothy Jean Furnish, and Mary Boys. In this way we will experience the different forces that guided religious education: progressive, neo-orthodox, and post-neo-orthodox. We will then add

¹ For a good survey of theories of Biblical education from 1900 to 1947, see Sara Little, The Role of the Bible in Contemporary Christian Education (Richmond: Knox, 1962), 13-24.

radical points of view by examining the thought of Mary Elizabeth Moore, Paolo Freire and Nelle Morton. These scholars are pioneers in education at this time in history. The radicalness of their thought may push us to additional insights, and new questions, in our quest for a liberating biblical pedagogy.

George Albert Coe

What is the Bible and why do we teach it? George Albert Coe describes the Bible as a "great body of symbols . . ." which is "the recorded expression of the growing religious experience of the chosen people."² The Bible is a product of experience, rather than a source of experience. Of course, as it came into existence, it did also become an element making up experience.³ The Bible is composed of writings that reflect "the social presuppositions of its own age, presuppositions that have to be examined, criticized and revised."⁴

God's revelation comes, not in the form of dogma to be transmitted, but "in the form of flesh . . . in Jesus Christ."⁵ This revelation is visible in education as a "growing communion with God, a gradual self-impartation of

² George Albert Coe, Education in Religion and Morals (Chicago: Revell, 1904), 152.

³ Ibid.,

⁴ George Albert Coe, A Social Theory of Religious Education (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1924), 67.

⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

God to his beloved child."⁶ The Bible is one of the sources that sets forth this revelation.⁷ The content of this revelation is that to love one's neighbor is to love God.⁸ The demand for social justice and the radical principle of human fellowship are revealed.⁹

The goal of religious education, then, is for the young to come to happy self-realization within the democracy of God. Religious education exists to cultivate the life from above, the good heart, that will transform society into the democracy of God.¹⁰ The Bible is essential to this process. Its power to stimulate and criticize social motives and ideals makes it a unique instrument for social education. Through the Bible students also

come into fellowship with the greatest of our social leaders, meeting God in them . . . a fellowship with the historical Jesus and the great Old Testament characters who influenced his own social education.¹¹

The Bible, then, is not an end in itself, but an instrument in the transformation of society into the democracy of God.¹² To this end, education aims for the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Coe, Education, 299.

⁸ Coe, A Social Theory, 75.

⁹ Ibid., 92, 54ff.

¹⁰ Ibid., 55-56, viii.

¹¹ Ibid., 114.

¹² Ibid., 67.

right use of knowledge and power, rather than to merely instill knowledge and power.¹³ For Coe, right use means the transformation of society in concrete ways. He repeats this idea frequently, with clarity and force, as in the following statements.

What we need is not merely to be advised to love men more regardless of conditions, but also to see clearly that we are supporting customs and even laws that actually reward selfishness with power and honor.¹⁴

[Effective brotherhood is] . . . evidence such as health, food, laws, ballot boxes, homes, streets, schools, happy children. . . . Patience or any other virtue on a pedestal is unconvincing.¹⁵

As a result of these convictions, religious education is to be seen "not merely as a process whereby ancient standards are transmitted, but also as having a part in the revision of standards themselves."¹⁶ Religious education, therefore, works to promote growth rather than to impose truth.¹⁷ This growth toward the democracy of God comes "primarily in the awakening of religious experience in children through their contacts with persons who already have such experience."¹⁸ The concern of religious education is less with what the person has learned, than

¹³ Coe, Education, 17.

¹⁴ Coe, A Social Theory, 68.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, viii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

with what the person has become.¹⁹

How then should we teach the Bible? Coe reminds us that symbols are helpful only when they speak to experience. The Bible, as a body of symbols, helps us to name the reality we have experienced. He states a basic principle in this way:

The symbol (name, formula, rule, theory) should enter only when the pupil already needs it in order to fix and formulate and generalize something with which he is already at least partially acquainted.²⁰

"The mere possession of an appropriate symbol hastens the recognition of a deeper reality."²¹ Reality comes first, then the symbol. A student's experience comes first, and is named and deepened by the symbol. The Bible helps this process, for its content is in concrete form which grows in meaning as we grow.²²

The Bible, then, is a part of a curriculum which is grounded in the experience of the students and which aims at awakening religious experience in them. The Bible is a means for that awakening by helping students name their religious experience. A person "whose memory is stored with truth in the forms of Biblical phraseology [has] constant means of self-expression, and therefore, of

¹⁹ Coe, Education, 286.

²⁰ Ibid., 156.

²¹ Ibid., 162.

²² Ibid., 158-160.

self-understanding."²³ The Bible also provides contacts with people of faith experiences in history. It is a unique source of principles in the struggle for social justice, for issues are presented in their concrete context of persons and events. The power of emotions and of imagination should be used to enhance these understandings of the Bible.²⁴

Coe is extremely aware of the importance of knowing who the students are. He calls for an experiential education that is scientifically based upon studies in developmental psychology and psychology of religion. His work, The Spiritual Life, is an example of a systematic study of religious experience.²⁵ In all his work he advocates an educational methodology "based upon psychological knowledge and the principles of education."²⁶

Community is central for religious education because it is the locus of experience. In community, we must "reveal the terrible meaning of love."²⁷ Fellowship is essential as an experience of "simple democracies at play," bringing nearer "the world-wide realization of the

²³ Ibid., 161.

²⁴ Coe, A Social Theory, 116.

²⁵ George Albert Coe, The Spiritual Life (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1900).

²⁶ Coe, Education, 287.

²⁷ Ibid., 57.

democracy of God."²⁸ The chief task of religious education is not to impart information but to maintain sound community life which carries on tasks of social justice. Community keeps thought and action from getting separated, for in the "various forms of community life . . . the Kingdom of God is actualized."²⁹

Coe's thought, almost a century later, is still fresh and enlightening. The Bible is symbol, the result of the experience of revelation. Social justice, the democracy of God, is the goal of education. Such education is grounded in community, the source of religious experience and learning.

Coe speaks as a progressive educator, one who centers learning on experience, one who believes deeply and optimistically in the potential of the individual and the possibilities for the progressive, scientific transformation of society. These assumptions, however, are not so easily held by a world that experienced world wars, or by Christians who hold a deep awareness of the sinfulness of humanity and the transcendent other nature of God. These theologians of the neo-orthodox movement challenged the work of progressive educators and proposed different models.

²⁸ Coe, A Social Theory, 89.

²⁹ Coe, Education, 167.

Sophia Lyon Fahs

Sophia Lyon Fahs, a noted progressive religious educator, worked to respond to such neo-orthodox scholars.³⁰ Her work became the basis for the theological and educational stance of Unitarians and Universalists. Unfortunately, her work was often ignored (or not known) in the early attempts to integrate neo-orthodox theology with progressive educational practices.³¹ Fahs' thought, however, is rich theologically and educationally and deserves attention. Unabashedly written from a progressive point of view, it states a clear theological position concerning the Bible, based on historical-critical method. Her ideas have been important to some key religious educators, namely Nelle Morton.³²

Fahs' answer to the questions "what is the Bible and why do we teach it" is a thoughtful reaction to older theological answers to these questions. The new Bible, she states, is "the human drama of one people, Israel, containing the recorded memories of their outstanding religious prophets and teachers."³³

³⁰ Norma H. Thompson, ed. Religious Education and Theology (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1982), 3.

³¹ Thompson points out that Fahs' work was published too late to influence the new Presbyterian curriculum, "Christian Faith and Life" which was one of these attempts at integration. *Ibid.*, 4.

³² From a conversation with Morton, Fall 1984.

³³ Sophia Lyon Fahs, Today's Children and Yesterday's

This new Bible is opposed to the old Bible of Orthodox Jews and pre-scholarship Christians. The old Bible was seen as a "world drama of salvation planned by God himself."³⁴ She calls the old Bible the Great Story of Salvation. This older understanding sees the Bible as a simple "record of God's plan for mankind's destiny."³⁵ This record tells of God's continuing purpose throughout the seven ages of humankind, rescuing humans, punishing the sinful.³⁶ In this conceptual framework, Jesus is the Supernatural Savior and life boils down to a struggle between Good and Evil.³⁷

If, in an attempt to be modern, spiritual truths are lifted out of the Bible while still employing this conceptual framework, they are truths Fahs would choose to reject. Such truths would embody an old cosmology and an old morality. For example, lifting spiritual truths from Genesis in the Old Story of Salvation would yield a cosmology of a past Golden Age in which all of God's work was completed. Such an understanding is diametrically opposite to scientific understandings of evolution and

Heritage: A Philosophy of Creative Religious Development
(Boston: Beacon, 1952), 83.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 62.

³⁶ Ibid., 62-75.

³⁷ Ibid., 124-140.

theological concepts of God's ongoing acts of creation.³⁸

Fahs calls for an end to the split between biblical scholarship and Bible teaching in the church.³⁹ The time has come to accept biblical scholarship and to be honest about what the Bible, the new Bible, is. The Bible records a variety of human experiences. These experiences are recorded in a collection of many books written by different authors at different times, in different places, representing different ethical and religious beliefs. The Bible does not contain a unified system of religious beliefs with one message of truth. Not only are there different messages, but these messages are colored by the nationalistic view of the Hebrews, who saw themselves as the Chosen People.⁴⁰

As a result of this new understanding, studying the Bible means recognizing "narrow prejudicial and unscientific assumptions" and separating them from the "jewels" of "universal feelings and ideas and experiences."⁴¹ The Bible, and Jesus, must be studied in their historical contexts.⁴² She asserts that "no longer can authority for

³⁸ Ibid., 104-107.

³⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 76-77.

⁴¹ Ibid., 81.

⁴² Fahs, Today's Children, 82. For Fahs, the divine Jesus must be replaced by the historical Jesus, the great religious leader and prophet.

the teachings of the Bible be derived from the Bible itself."⁴³ Instead, scholars and students must compare present ideals to those in the biblical text. The Bible must be evaluated in light of today's culture, as well as vice versa.⁴⁴ The Bible, then, is an important historical document, but it is not unique. It should be studied along with others.⁴⁵

The result of this point of view is that "everyone, in a measure, must be a theologian."⁴⁶ This statement is the basis for her answer to the question of "how do we teach the Bible." Fahs is concerned with teaching children, yet her words apply to adults also. Her educational method parallels her understanding of the new Bible. Just as the Bible is a record of human experience, so also should the educational starting point be the religious feelings of the students.⁴⁷ Experience must be explored in a religious way in order to create insights and ambition. She elaborates:

When such a religious quality of exploration is the goal, any subject, any phenomenon, anything, animate or inanimate, human or animal, may be the starting point.⁴⁸

⁴³ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 180.

A religious quality of exploration is the center of her methodology. These assumptions are central: what we believe about the nature of the Bible is important; how we believe is also important. We must teach students not to believe simply because "the Bible says so," or authoritatively. They must be taught to probe, to take responsibility for their interpretations, to think things out for themselves.⁴⁹ No special religious knowledge exists that they must assimilate. Instead they must "feel the Mystery of Life" before they have it explained to them.⁵⁰

A religious quality of exploration, therefore, entails asking what in the students' experience is of importance to them. What in their experience causes wonder, conflict, the need for guidance? To explore these experiences in a religious way is to employ a way "that dips into the heart of things, into personal feelings, . . . that touches universal relationships."⁵¹ It is a way that works on discovering satisfying human relationships (as opposed to listing ideal Christian character traits).⁵² Students are helped to understand "the larger strategic emotional conflicts of our time."⁵³ They are enabled also to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 22-25, 29.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 98.

⁵¹ Ibid., 179.

⁵² Fahs, Today's Children, 184.

⁵³ Ibid., 185.

explore the natural world.⁵⁴ Most importantly, they are helped to grow in self-understanding.⁵⁵

The Bible, as a record of historical experience, should not be studied until the students (especially children) can learn from a knowledge of the past. It is a resource to help understand present problems. It should be taught as the new Bible, open to the students' interpretation in light of present scholarship and ideals. Yet the old Story of Salvation must be studied also, for it has been an important influence in Western culture.⁵⁶ This old Story must be compared with present-day philosophical and scientific thought. The student can be helped to understand the conceptual framework that produced the old Story. This conceptual framework was from a time when "kings ruled and subjects obeyed, when it was believed that wrongdoing must be avenged by punishment and goodness especially rewarded."⁵⁷

Fahs has many illustrations in her books about her method. She often starts with exploring religious experiences of peoples of other cultures and background. She centers the educational exploration on the students' experience and questions. When those questions lead to

⁵⁴ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 190.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 181-182.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 94-95.

wanting a knowledge of the Bible, or needing an understanding of Western culture, then the Bible is introduced. The contrast between the old Bible and the new Bible is made explicit. Her methods are grounded in her work with children.

Her stories of her experiences with children are exciting and stimulating. She tells the story, for example, of older elementary students who were studying prayer. They corresponded with major scientists, asking them if they prayed. The letters they received (Einstein was one correspondent) stimulated further inquiry and searching.⁵⁸ Clearly they were becoming, in their own right,探者 and interpreters of religious experience and of the Bible. Through this approach to faith and the Bible, the students learned a creative religion from

individuals or groups who could face directly for themselves the problems of existence, who penetrated courageously the forms and rituals, who believed the truth had not finally been delivered.⁵⁹

Thus they have become such individuals themselves, true theologians and shapers of their faith traditions.

Fahs advocates teaching the Bible as the source of Christian tradition and of ideals with which to evaluate the present. The Bible is not, for Fahs, a unique source of revelation or the authoritative, sole witness to God.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 167-175.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 25.

This theological position, typical of liberal, progressive religious educators such as Coe and Fahs, was criticized by neo-orthodox scholars such as James D. Smart.

James D. Smart

James D. Smart was an influential, neo-orthodox scholar who was actively involved in shaping church school curriculum in the 1950s and 1960s. In a key work, The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church, Smart encapsulates a scholarly, neo-orthodox position and makes clear his own theological stance, one that is critical of both liberal and conservative approaches to the Bible.⁶⁰ Smart, like Fahs, also sees the educational question to be determined by the question of hermeneutics, or interpretation. His work draws heavily on Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann, scholars who did much interpretive work and were of central importance to the neo-orthodox movement in the United States.

The questions "what is the Bible and why teach it" are, for Smart, inseparable, as will be seen in the following discussion. Smart states that the Bible contains the content of God's revelation. Following Barth's lead, he maintains that the words, even the ideas, in the Bible are not the Word of God. The Word of God is "God himself in

⁶⁰ James D. Smart, The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).

his chosen way of coming to man."⁶¹ This revelation of the way God responds to humankind, as experienced first by Israel and then through Jesus Christ, "has access to each new age only through the narrow channel of Scripture."⁶²

Smart emphasizes the hiddenness of God. The primary reality, he says, is the mystery of God.⁶³ Yet the church is always trying to make God tangible, visible, and incontestable. God, on the other hand, is not necessarily easily identifiable. God's ways are visible only to the eyes of faith.⁶⁴ The reading and exposition of Scripture is the only access to this reality of God's presence in history.⁶⁵

Smart approaches his discussion of the nature of the Bible with certain assumptions. Although the Bible was written over many different centuries, in many different cultures and settings, although the many authors speak in many different voices, yet it contains a unity of witness to the God who responds to humans.⁶⁶ To the biblical authors, "God's thoughts concerning man . . . are

⁶¹ Ibid., 100.

⁶² Ibid., 144.

⁶³ Ibid., 131.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 98-100.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 143.

⁶⁶ Smart, The Strange Silence, 88.

primary."⁶⁷ The authors "stand firmly with God in the unseen and from there look penetratingly into our human situation."⁶⁸ At the same time, the Scriptures contain a large amount of human words about God, and of descriptions of the human response to God. They are a dialogue: humans responding to God's initiative; God responding to human response. The assumption is that the Bible starts from God and works down to humankind.⁶⁹

Another theological assumption is so important that it must be quoted. He states:

If for us as for all the Biblical witnesses the ultimate and disastrous illusion of man is the identification of anything in himself with God, if we know at the base of our own life a relationship with God in which the only life worth having has to be given to us from beyond ourselves, we do not find ourselves so far removed from the prophet and apostle.⁷⁰

Humans are totally alien from God. Meaning is given to human life from beyond, by a God present in history. These theological assumptions differ greatly from the optimistic ones of Coe and Fahs, whose educational approaches are based on assumptions of goodness and God-like potential in the human character. In the view of the progressives, God is internal, accessible through ideals, principles, and experiences. For Smart, although God is ultimately

⁶⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 136.

involved in human affairs, yet God is portrayed as external, hidden, different. God's involvement confronts humans with their blindness, their need for judgment and new life; in other words, with their sinfulness.⁷¹

The Bible, then, is the door to the revelation of God among us, perhaps the only door. The Bible must be taught, and taught well, because the encounter with the text confronts the reader with the presence of God with "the mind and spirit of Christ."⁷² The church cannot be obedient to Christ without this confrontation. This confrontation renews the church, liberating it from paralyzing ideas and structures.⁷³ The church also needs the tie with its community to origin as represented in Scripture in order to continue a faithful existence in this time. Such faithful existence must be true to its roots and at the same time contemporary in its message and witness to God today. For in the remembrance of the past the vision of the future is born.⁷⁴

The problem, as Smart sees it, is that the church has been less and less faithful in teaching the Bible in both conservative and liberal circles. Smart attributes this lack to the gap between biblical scholars and preachers/

⁷¹ Ibid., 105.

⁷² Ibid., 25.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Smart, The Strange Silence, 145.

teachers, and the gap between preachers/teachers and lay-people.⁷⁵ The primary cause of these gaps is that scholars have, in an attempt to be scientific, ignored the hermeneutical task that accompanies exegesis. They have also ignored the hermeneutical assumptions which have guided their work. Smart's discussion of how to redress these problems speaks to the question of how, the question of education.

Biblical critical scholarship has been extremely helpful in illuminating the interpretive contexts within which the biblical authors operated. Such scholarly work has made much clearer the meaning of the text at the time of its writing. It has helped demonstrate the humanity and reality of the biblical peoples.⁷⁶ It has also defamiliarized the biblical texts, making them more strange to modern hearers. This strangeness is good, in that it opens up more possibilities for hearing God's word afresh.

This strangeness is also the heart of the educational problem: the gap in interpretive contexts between the writers and the hearers is so wide as to seem insurmountable to many preachers and laypeople. The traditions and the world views of the inhabitant of the ancient world are radically different from those of the modern one. As a result, modern learners either approach the Bible in a

⁷⁵ Ibid., 15-27.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 83.

pietistic, individualistic, trivial manner, or they ignore it altogether.⁷⁷

The solution must work to make the Bible story our story.⁷⁸ It must make the biblical community of faith "the primary context for our existence."⁷⁹ The first step is to be aware that we come to the text already armed with an interpretive framework.⁸⁰ Then, aware of our own biases, we should explore what the text meant to the writers in its time. We must probe "behind the text" for theological ideas.⁸¹ This probing of the depths of the text works to "liberate the realities of God's presence in the text" from ancient thought forms.⁸² These realities must then be expressed in contemporary form. The Bible thereby becomes a "magic glass," a transparency, through which we look to see our world.⁸³

The teacher and preacher are called by Smart to help laypeople live in two worlds, ancient and modern, and to find the realities of God's presence in both. The gap between the two very different interpretive contexts can be

⁷⁷ Ibid., 117-124.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 124

⁷⁹ Ibid., 89.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 53

⁸¹ Ibid., 60.

⁸² Ibid., 155.

⁸³ Smart, The Strange Silence, 163.

narrowed by a common tradition carried by the church.⁸⁴ The community of faith thus is the context within which the Bible must be studied, for the Bible is a public book, not a private one.⁸⁵ The community of faith is also the locus of the risen Christ and can confront narrow and stultifying interpretations of Scripture. Both Bible and community of faith, therefore, are necessary parts of a dialectic that reveals God's presence.⁸⁶

In sum, the community of faith receives God's revelation, a message of God's presence in judgment and grace, through the Bible. All members must be taught to use the results of biblical scholarship to familiarize themselves with the biblical world in order to make it part of their own world. Interpretation must be recognized at work in the biblical writings and in the reading of these writings. By probing for the theology of the writers, and for their methods of interpretation within the canon, moderns can be guided to interpret the texts in ways that confront the contemporary world with God's presence.

Smart's emphasis on the centrality of hermeneutics is an important challenge to us. His views of Scripture and God are clearly formulated in neo-orthodox terms. These views guide him to advocate biblical education that looks

⁸⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 148.

different from that of the progressives. His methodology starts with the biblical texts. It focuses on interpretive tools, without much regard to the different experiences of the reader. The emphasis is on God rather than on the reader, on confrontation rather than development. In spite of his brief discussion of the dialectic nature of Scripture and contemporary community of faith, the emphasis is on Scripture confronting the community today, rather than the community confronting the Scripture. If Scripture is confronted, what is challenged is past interpretations rather than the texts themselves. This point will be important as we discuss hermeneutics in more depth in Chapter 4.

Iris V. Cully

The next two writers have been selected due to their great influence in departments of Christian Education and in churches from the 1960s to the present. They represent a generation that attempted to bring together the best of both the progressives and the neo-orthodox. Their writings reflect both theological and practical, concrete, educational concerns.

For Iris Cully, the Bible is revelation, the "self-disclosure of God."⁸⁷ The Bible gives a personal knowledge of God, rather than about God, a deep knowledge that leads

⁸⁷ Iris V. Cully, Imparting the Word: The Bible in Christian Education (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 16.

the "knower into love, devotion and obedience."⁸⁸ The Bible confronts us with a Person, rather than being merely a collection of writings to be learned.⁸⁹ While readers must be aware of the diversity of materials and backgrounds that are in the Bible, they must also see its unity. This unity comes from the theme of God's goodness, which is opposed by human unfaithfulness. In goodness, God acts--saving, directing, even working through the devious.⁹⁰ Yet, due to the dangers of misinterpretation, the Bible must not be worshipped or equated with God.⁹¹ It tells of God, who is Creator, Judge, and Redeemer.

The Bible must become central again in Christian Education. Cully states, "Today the Protestant layman seems to be giving up the right, so hardly won, to search the Scriptures."⁹² Exercising this right to search Scripture enables a person to be in the presence of God, to hear God's call and to respond in faith.⁹³ The Bible is integral to the spiritual life of individuals and the community. It deals with real relationships between God and people, thereby offering spiritual insights for all

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 47, 56.

⁹¹ Ibid., 24.

⁹² Ibid., 128.

⁹³ Ibid., 115.

ages.⁹⁴ The Bible is the foundation of the church, the well-spring of Christian action. Yet, while a primary resource, it is not the only one.⁹⁵

The goal is to teach people to know the contents of the Bible. People must be helped to encounter the Bible as a unity, to encounter not only the good, but also the evil.⁹⁶ They must be brought to see that the human-divine drama pictured in the Bible is continually being reenacted.⁹⁷ Through Bible study they can sense the transcendence of God, identifying with those who heard God's call and responded, and recognize the ways in which they are like those who did not respond.⁹⁸

Cully's answer to the methodology question, how, has a theological base. God, as Holy Spirit, is part of the learning-teaching process. Cully formulates a triangle with God at the apex, while teacher and learner form the base. God is the teacher; teachers and learners are both students.⁹⁹ She reminds us that "God the Holy Spirit guided those who write and continues to guide those who

⁹⁴ Iris V. Cully, Education for Spiritual Growth (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 121-122.

⁹⁵ Cully, Imparting, 14.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁸ Cully, Education, 95, 110.

⁹⁹ Cully, Imparting, 152.

hear and read."¹⁰⁰ The Holy Spirit works in community; community is the locus for the learning and interpretation of the Bible.¹⁰¹

The teacher is an important witness to God in the teaching of the Bible. The teacher shares that the Bible is good news, not only through words, but also in his or her manners, materials, and discussions.¹⁰² The teacher teaches a sound intellectual approach. At the same time, the Bible is made to seem personal, for the Christian does not read the Bible objectively. "It is always his book, a book written for him, a word spoken to him, within the worshipping community."¹⁰³

Cully refuses to argue the old question of starting points. Teaching can either start with biblical stories that are then paralleled to contemporary experience, or it can begin with life experiences and use the Bible as guidance.¹⁰⁴ What is important is to help the students become participants in the Bible events. They must be taught historical-critical research tools that help them see the biblical events from within, that help them understand the people, culture, problems of that time.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 57.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 129.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 57.

When they see from within, they can begin to appreciate the similarities of feelings, such as joy, love, hate, courage, fear, between the people of those times and themselves.¹⁰⁵ Through participation in biblical events, through drama, reading, poetry, art, music, etc., the students begin to see how the Bible speaks to problems in their own lives. They can be brought to understand the Bible, not as a provider of simple answers, but as a promise of God's help, as in past situations.¹⁰⁶

Participation makes the learners ask if they would have done the same. The students come to know that they too are in the presence of God. They learn that "all decisions answer for or against the command of God."¹⁰⁷ They learn that life confronts them with faith decisions. Students also learn the important act of sharing their faith with others.¹⁰⁸

Cully emphasizes the importance of knowing who the students are. The teacher must address their concerns and listen to their problems. Developmental levels, ages, experiences, must be taken into account.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the teacher too is a learner. Teachers must be worshipping

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 106-107.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 108-109.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 113.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 114-120.

¹⁰⁹ Cully, Imparting, 126-127.

with their community of faith, reading the Bible utilizing historical-critical tools, and participating in leadership training.¹¹⁰

Cully's answer to what is the Bible puts her somewhat in between the progressives and the neo-orthodox. While the Bible is revelation, it is only one source of that revelation. The community too plays a role, as the bearer of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, the Bible, while diverse, is seen as a unity, as a confrontation with God acting in history. The Bible teaches us about both the evil and good side of human nature. She too stresses the importance of historical-critical tools. A clear hermeneutic principle to guide the use of these tools is evident: "The creative work of God must always be seen in light of his redemptive work and his ultimate purpose."¹¹¹

Dorothy Jean Furnish

The works of Dorothy Jean Furnish have the grace of being, on the one hand, scholarly and, on the other hand, accessible to the lay Christian educator. Her subject is how to teach the Bible with children. Yet her statements are easily applicable to the education of adults. She is keenly aware of the impact of the question "what is the Bible" and on the question "how do we teach it." She explores this relationship between hermeneutics and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 145-147.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 54.

methodology. This exploration, combined with her critique of different hermeneutical models, makes her work important and interesting to us.

In her most thorough work, Exploring the Bible with Children,¹¹² Furnish discusses five different hermeneutical perspectives on the Bible that differ from hers. Each perspective leads to different educational goals, materials, curriculum, and teaching processes. We will consider these approaches briefly. The first understands the Bible literally, as the actual words of God. The resulting educational style emphasizes memorization, a focus on the details of a biblical text and story without the use of outside sources, and on its moral applications.¹¹³ The second perspective sees the Bible as God's Word, but is aware that acts of interpretation are necessary. The goal is to keep interpretation to a minimum, while focusing on a knowledge of the Bible stories without stressing precise words. Students are encouraged to understand the writers, the culture and history represented through the use of some additional resources.¹¹⁴ The third perspective sees the Bible as a sourcebook about human beings, rather than about God. The Bible is seen as

¹¹² Dorothy Jean Furnish, Exploring the Bible with Children (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975).

¹¹³ Ibid., 29-30.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 30-31.

important for the traditions it carries, and for the suggestions of answers to the problems of living. Educationally this perspective translates into putting the child's needs first, then referring to the Bible to validate a common sense solution, or to stimulate thinking.¹¹⁵ A fourth perspective understands the Bible as the history of God's people through which God made Godself known. Teaching therefore focuses on Bible customs, geography, sequences of events, etc.¹¹⁶ The fifth perspective, rather than emphasizing God's role or humans' role, balances the two. The Bible is witness to the divine-human encounter, written by witnesses and participants in these encounters. The Bible is not objective. Therefore, education will help students subjectively experience how it felt to be on the human side of these encounters and what these people learned about God.¹¹⁷

Furnish has clearly, if a little simply, laid out differences among conservatives, progressives such as Coe and Fahs, and neo-orthodox educators such as Smart. She offers a sixth perspective, a perspective with echoes from both progressive and neo-orthodoxy, as a possibility for bringing some of these different views together. For Furnish, the Bible is both a witness of the divine-human

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 31-32.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 33-34.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 33-36.

encounter in the past and a confronting, now event. She states:

As an Event it has within itself the power to bring the past into the present in such a spectacular way that the Bible becomes a "now" Event in the lives of persons today. It is an Event through which God seeks to make himself known to us just as he did through the events of the past to which it witnesses.¹¹⁸

The Bible as a confronting event presents at least four themes that need to be emphasized. The first theme is "people are in trouble," and it focuses on the human predicament. The unfolding drama of God acting in history through saving events makes up the second theme. The third theme emphasizes the centrality of Jesus Christ, through whom God has acted in a unique manner. Finally, the Bible presents us with the theme of the "for-usness of God." God is for us in many different ways.¹¹⁹ These themes are not final: many meanings are still to be discovered. Rather they are invitations that help the learners encounter God.¹²⁰

Furnish develops the educational implications of this hermeneutical framework in the rest of this and other works. The goal of biblical education is to help children discover that it has meaning for their present lives.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Furnish, Exploring, 37.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 40-50.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 48.

¹²¹ Ibid., 91.

She states her point of view: "To teach the Bible is to talk about life. To talk about life [within the Christian community] is to teach the Bible."¹²²

Since life within the Christian community and the Bible are so interrelated, the question who becomes crucial. The learners must be known and understood. Their emotions, interests, relationships, cognitive processes, must be taken into account. Furnish issues a challenge: "Today's children are strangers, wanting and waiting to be known."¹²³

The key characteristic of children, and of all learners, is that they are experiencers. They experience feelings, curiosities, imagination. They find meanings for their experiences. This characteristic becomes the educational meeting point with the Bible, for the Bible is the experiences of the Judeo-Christian communities as they encountered God in their lives.¹²⁴ The starting point is both the Bible and the life experiences of the learners. Life experiences must be interpreted within the context of the Christian community and the Bible. Biblical materials must be taught experientially, in light of and related to present experiences.¹²⁵

¹²² Ibid., 81.

¹²³ Ibid., 58. This statement also rings true for women.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 21, 87.

Furnish declares that learning occurs through discovery, exploration, investigation and participation.¹²⁶ She suggests many tools by which such learning can take place. For Furnish, the heart of the educational process is to help the learners participate in the world of the Bible, absorb its background, and search for present meanings in it for themselves.¹²⁷

The biblical texts contain no final meaning, but many meanings. Learners are to be encouraged "to see themselves as part of a long line of biblical interpreters."¹²⁸ As interpreters, learners and the church are confronted with God. They in turn must be encouraged to respond out of this encounter. This response can express feelings and ideas in a variety of forms: plays, poems, action, worship.¹²⁹

Furnish advances the discussion of biblical education in several ways. She lays out clearly the relationship between a hermeneutical framework and educational methodology. She avoids a Bible/experience split by linking the two. She insists on the experimental nature of learning. She underlines the importance of the learner as interpreter. She stresses that biblical learning is a community

¹²⁶ Furnish, Exploring, 16.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 102-103, 111.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 116.

¹²⁹ Dorothy Jean Furnish, Living the Bible with Children (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 32.

affair. However, her theology and educational methodology do not deal with a question crucial to this paper: radical transformation. Does finding meaning in one's life with the help of the Bible lead to dramatic and radical transformation? If so, in what ways is the encounter of Bible and personal experience transformative? Furnish's methodology has not linked interpretation and change.

Mary C. Boys

Mary C. Boys is a Roman Catholic scholar who has focused some of her work on biblical education. She is making important contributions to the field of religious education at this time. Her work adds to our understanding of biblical education in two areas.

The first area to which Boys speaks is the relationship between a hermeneutic framework and religious education.

Her book, Biblical Interpretation in Religious Education,¹³⁰ explores the way in which the hermeneutical principle of heilgeschichte, that is Salvation History, was used to link biblical theology and religious education. The details of this exploration do not need to be reproduced here.

Certain conclusions, however, are of particular interest. Boys shows how, with heilgeschichte, religious education and biblical theology "were intertwined."¹³¹ Yet, since

¹³⁰ Mary C. Boys, Biblical Interpretation in Religious Education (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1980).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

the denouement of salvation history, "religious education has not been as readily linked with biblical theology."¹³² Several reasons for the denouement of heilgeschichte emerge. First, one hermeneutical principle is theologically inadequate to carry the whole burden of the interpretation of the Bible. Secondly, cataclysmic cultural changes in the 1960s brought questions and doubts that were not compatible with the progressivist, optimistic attitudes inherent in heilgeschichte. Finally, a change in education theory, with the renewal of interest in human potential and radical ideas of deschooling, caused a deemphasis on tradition, as embodied in salvation history.¹³³ Thus, she points out, biblical scholars are not the only influences on biblical education. The cultural and educational movements of the time are also involved. Boys' analysis demonstrates the link between a hermeneutic and educational methodology.

Heilgeschichte was an important hermeneutic to influential Protestant educators such as James Smart. It can be found as central to the Presbyterian Christian Faith and Life curriculum in which Smart was involved. Iris Cully's work of that time also reflects a strong importance of this hermeneutic. But the salvation history hermeneutic cannot, especially alone, give meaning to the Bible in contemporary times. Yet without it, the gap between biblical scholars

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 140-273.

and educators has again widened. Biblical criticism is still not taught in the churches. The old polarities of Bible versus experience, tradition versus transformation, again raise their heads.

Boys' second major contribution deals with the issue of tradition and transformation. In an important article on this subject, she traces the tendency of religious educators to polarize the two.¹³⁴ Coe specifically rejected the idea of religious education as a passing on of tradition.¹³⁵ As we have seen above, he saw religious education as a vehicle for transforming society. On the other hand, some educators, such as we have seen with Smart, have advocated education that, at base, is designed to pass on the tradition, especially as carried in the Bible.¹³⁶

Boys proposes that, keeping in mind the tension between the two, we should employ the word "and." Tradition and transformation are thus kept in a dialectic.¹³⁷ Each one is necessary to the other. Without one the other is doomed to be inadequate and stagnant. The Bible itself

¹³⁴ Boys, "Access to Traditions and Transformation."

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁶ These dichotomies are not quite as clear as some might make them. As we have seen, progressives such as Coe and Fahs saw education in the tradition as important. Smart, Cully, and Furnish all emphasize the confrontation aspects of the biblical tradition. This confrontation has potential for transformation.

¹³⁷ Boys, "Access to Traditions and Transformation."

demonstrates this principle clearly. Within the Bible, tradition is often dramatically reactualized to give hope or to have meaning in a new situation. In Second Isaiah, for example, the writer takes the radical step of equating the Babylonian exile and return with the Exodus.¹³⁸ Thus, through reinterpretation, the tradition was both passed on and revitalized. Jesus' parables and sayings are also examples of this same process of teaching and reinterpreting tradition in order to spark transformation.¹³⁹

Boys coins an important phrase to describe the task of religious education. The goal is to "make accessible."¹⁴⁰ To make accessible allows for the grace of God and the freedom of the learner in the educative process.¹⁴¹ Both tradition and transformation are to be made accessible by educators and theologians. The Bible, as we have seen, indicates ways in which tradition is to be made accessible. These ways make of tradition something that is living and meaningful to contemporary life. The biblical use of tradition demonstrates that tradition only lives when it is interpreted anew.¹⁴² Transformation is made accessible by acting upon tradition. Such action has been the basis

¹³⁸ Ibid., 16-17.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 16-19.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 14-15 especially.

¹⁴¹ Boys, "Access," 15.

¹⁴² Ibid., 21.

of the building up of the church. She adds, "Traditions, derived from living, provided the reflective basis for action. Practice, in turn, shaped the preservation of tradition."¹⁴³

Thus we see that for Boys the Bible is part of a living tradition that, through contemporary interpretation, becomes a base for transformative action. The purpose of religious education is to make both tradition and transformation accessible to ourselves and to others.¹⁴⁴ Educational methodology should include three interrelated modes of teaching which mirror pedagogical methods in the Bible. The proclaimatory mode makes kerygmatic statements, telling of God's acts. However, proclamation can be overly used. The mode of narration enhances proclamation with imagination-gripping stories that help socialize neophytes. These first two modes are interrelated with the mode of interpretation. Boys describes this mode:

Interpretation is the critical distance the hearers put between themselves and the narrative so as to determine the implications. It encompasses what is called "formation of conscience" and respects the mystery of divine grace and human freedom.¹⁴⁵

Boys finds the two interpretive movements of a

¹⁴³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴⁴ Boys points out that "the unfinished nature of tradition means that the church is not only teacher but also learner." Ibid., 21.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 28-29.

"hermeneutic of suspicion" and a "hermeneutic of restoration" advocated by Paul Ricoeur to be most useful for this educational mode.¹⁴⁶ She calls for more exploration into the question of education that facilitates critical inquiry and critical reconstruction.¹⁴⁷

Boys' thoughts concerning tradition and transformation have served to underline this writer's contention that teaching the biblical texts and traditions is important, and indeed essential, in making transformation accessible to women within the Christian community. Her dialectical approach breaks out of old dichotomies. This break allows for a new vision of biblical education. It also allows for the voices of the scholars of the past, such as the ones we have examined above, to be heard again. We must recognize the deep differences in their thought at the same time that we acknowledge its richness. Boys' vision of the dialectical nature of tradition and transformation may serve as a guide later as we attempt to utilize the many, sometimes opposing ideas of these scholars.

Mary Elizabeth Moore

Mary Elizabeth Moore, in her work Education for Continuity and Change, has taken more radical steps to deal with the tradition/transformation, continuity/change, and

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Bible/experience dichotomies.¹⁴⁸ Her approach is more radical because she looks at the basic intellectual framework, the basic understandings of reality, that make these elements into dualities. She describes the ways tradition and transformation often have been seen as dichotomies or, at best, as with Boys, held in a balanced relationship.¹⁴⁹ She maintains strongly, however, that they are not dualities. Her thesis is that

the more a person is continuous with the past,
the greater are the possibilities for change,
and the more he or she changes, the more that
person is continuous with the past.¹⁵⁰

Moore proposes a rethinking of our basic understanding of each of these realities important to Christian religious education: tradition, experience, the individual, and the community. She sharpens the word tradition by adding the concept of "traditioning," that is the process of carrying on tradition. Traditioning is a gift handed to the community by God that must be preserved. At the same time, it has the power to transform. Traditioning thus carries both continuity and change. It has human-human and God-human dimensions. Scripture is a part of the traditions handed on in the traditioning process.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Mary Elizabeth Moore, Education for Continuity and Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-55.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

Experience too has several dimensions. "It is the process of observing, participating in, or living through events."¹⁵² Process is a key word here, for experience is "both a process and the result of process."¹⁵³ Experience also means the collective wisdom of the community, the accumulated wisdom of humanity in writings and oral memories, and the "cultural, historical and future dimensions of experience" with which every person interacts.¹⁵⁴

The key word to describe the nature of the individual and the community is, again, process. Grounded in George Herbert Mead's theory of social development and Alfred North Whitehead's philosophical understanding of the nature of reality, Moore presents an understanding of the essentially processive nature of the individual. Individuals are both stable and changing, both individual and social, and both acting and acted upon. Individuals exist at intersections of relationships with many people, cultural forces, environments, etc.¹⁵⁵ The community too is processive, existing at intersections between the past, present and future. The church is the traditioning community: bearer of the past, always interpreting this

¹⁵² Ibid., 24.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., especially 92-93, 111-115.

past with eyes on the present and future. The traditioning community is thus an interpreting community. Such an understanding assumes that

revelation continues through history and that the community's understanding at a given time is a synthesis of all the past, present, and future influences acting on the community.¹⁵⁶

This community is also a transforming community, one that acts in the world. It helps "people look forward and hope in God's promise" and enables them to "vision, plan, and act."¹⁵⁷

These understandings of traditioning, experience, individual and community become the basis of a new model of education. This model centers on the task of involving persons in the living Christian tradition. This task has two inseparable dimensions: hermeneutics and transformation.¹⁵⁸ This task takes place at intersections: intersections of persons with God, with the past, with the future. Education at each intersection requires communication and interpretation, the hermeneutical dimension, and also decision, the transformative dimension. The interpretive task includes the transmission, or communication, of the wealth of experiences of the community, both historical and contemporary. These experiences form a reservoir from which the community can draw resources. Interpretation of

¹⁵⁶ M. E. Moore, 81.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 84.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 123,

these experiences includes reflection, critical and intuitive pondering. This educational step demands imagination. With reflection and imagination, the story gets retold and transformed. The transformation asks the question "how is the community to act in the direction of the Kingdom of God?"¹⁵⁹ It moves us to the future. Moore reiterates: "The potential for transformation is maximized by a wealth of transmitted knowledge and by our critical and depth reflection on that knowledge"¹⁶⁰

Finally, this traditioning model contains four characteristics to keep the educational process dynamic: dialogue, curiosity and creativity, awe and hope, and integration of thought, feeling and action.¹⁶¹ These characteristics demand knowing the learners, through the knowledge of psychology and sociology, and through listening. They entail a non-banking form of education, with co-learning on the part of the teachers. The metaphor utilized for the teaching-learning process is that of co-travelers on a journey or pilgrimage.¹⁶²

Moore has greatly added to our understanding of teaching the Bible. She successfully addresses the old problems of starting points and of dichotomies between

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 131. This discussion taken from 127-132.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 132.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 140-146.

¹⁶² Ibid., 176.

experience and tradition. Her work challenges us to look at the underlying assumptions of the nature of reality, of individuals, and of community that cause us to frame problems as dualities. If, as she and many other scholars contend, these realities are processive, such dichotomies cannot truly exist dualistically. One pole is necessary to, and part of, the other. The starting point for education, then, is the intersection: the intersection of present with past and future, of individual with community, of community and individual with God. The heart of the educational task is hermeneutics and transformative action. This pedagogy takes the form of a journeying together of teachers and learners in community.

Two other radical educators must be examined at this point. We have briefly looked at their ideas in the previous chapter. We will now examine in greater depth some of their thought relevant to this study.

Paolo Freire

We have seen in the previous chapter that the goal of education for Paolo Freire is liberation. Liberation entails helping people move towards full humanity. Full humanity means seeing oneself as actor, rather than passively letting oneself be acted upon. Full humanity means that an oppressed person, caught in a limiting situation, can see the limits as "the frontier between being and being more human, rather than [as] the frontier

between being and nothingness."¹⁶³ Such a person can critically reflect upon the nature and cause of the limits, and act to change them.

To understand Freire's revolutionary educational methodology, we must examine his basic understanding of the nature of reality. Reality itself is a dialectical process, composed of radically different forces of oppression and freedom striving against each other. Reality is created by the actions of humans, and by the reflection of humans upon their existence.¹⁶⁴ Reality is changed by the word. The word has two dimensions, reflection and action. Both dimensions are essential to a true word. Thus a true word is a praxis. Freire declares: "To speak a true word is to transform the world."¹⁶⁵ In a footnote, he lays this idea out graphically: "Word [action, reflection] = work = praxis."¹⁶⁶

Another concept essential to understanding Freire's work is that of the nature of dialogue. He states: "Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the

¹⁶³ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 93.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 69. See for example his quote of the educator-peasant dialogue: "Let's say, for the sake of argument, that the men on earth were to die, but that the earth itself remained . . . wouldn't all this be a world?" "Oh no," the peasant replied emphatically. "There would be no one to say 'This is a world'."

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 75.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., note 1.

world, in order to name the world."¹⁶⁷ True dialogue is when different people who want to transform the world get together to name the reality in which they live. Dialogue is not true dialogue when one group wants to name the world for another group. Discussion that is hostile, polemical, seeking to impose a certain vision of reality upon someone else, is not true dialogue.¹⁶⁸ Dialogue only happens when leaders have love for humans and the world, humility about their own limitations, and faith in human power to recreate the world.¹⁶⁹

Dialogic education, therefore, requires a co-investigation by the teachers and the learners of the educational content. This educational content is determined by both learners and teachers. It has as its starting point the "present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people."¹⁷⁰ The reality within which people live, and the way that they are aware of that reality, are both objects of investigation by the teaching-learning team. The goal is not to transform the learners; this would make them into passive objects rather than active subjects. Rather the goal is to transform the

¹⁶⁷ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 76.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 76-77.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 77-79.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 85.

reality which is being investigated.¹⁷¹

The educational process is based on a problem-posing approach. Contradictions apparent between the concrete situation and people's awareness of that situation are lifted out and posed as problems to be discussed. A problem-posing methodology allows for true communication as teachers and learners together continue to pose problems and unveil reality. This method allows them to

perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.¹⁷²

Truth is not seen as a static body of knowledge that one group has and the other does not have. With a problem-posing methodology, education is not a process whereby learners are asked to consume someone else's knowledge. Freire labels this approach the "banking method" of education.¹⁷³ Problem-posing education, on the other hand, allows for people to produce and act upon their own ideas rather than consume those of others.¹⁷⁴

Problem-posing allows for critical reflection upon reality, and the way one has awareness of that reality, by

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 83-84.

¹⁷² Ibid., 71.

¹⁷³ See Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 57-66 for a description of banking education; and 66-74 for an elaboration of problem-posing, praxis education.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 100.

naming generative themes. These themes come from the dialectical nature of reality. Freire states:

An epoch is characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude. The concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede man's full humanization, constitute the themes of that epoch.¹⁷⁵

The naming of generative themes is the praxis of unveiling reality. Unveiling reality is necessary because of prevailing myths, fostered by the ruling elites, that create a false picture of the true situation. By investigating reality, by critical reflection of people's own awareness of that reality, and by naming reality as it really is, transformation occurs. A new consciousness arises that permits action, changing the oppressive limits within the current situation.¹⁷⁶

Freire's thought is complex. We have been able to look only at his major insights. The implications of these insights for biblical education, however, are profound. First, education that provides learners with a predigested body of knowledge to be consumed is oppressive. Biblical education that attempts to transmit already interpreted biblical material for learners to consume is banking education. Second, learning is an investigative process

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 100-101. See 100-118 for details.

engaged in jointly by both teachers and students. Biblical education too must be truly dialogical. Third, the reality in which the learners live is to be the object of investigation. In biblical education, the reality of the learners is, as M. E. Moore has pointed out, the intersection of their individual experience with God and with the community experience. Both individual and community experience contain the traditions of the past, including the Bible, as well as experiences of the present and future. This experience also includes the learners' awareness of their experience and of the reality within which they live. All of these experiences form the content of education.¹⁷⁷

Fourth, an essential part of the educational task of critical reflection involves naming. Naming is both an act of interpretation and of transformation. Once a reality is named as oppressive, it can be changed. Oppressive realities in biblical tradition cannot be ignored. They must be named as oppressive, and acted on to be transformed. This step includes the important act of reflecting upon the students' awareness of the particular tradition in question. A change takes place in both the tradition and the students. The tradition can lose the power to oppress.

¹⁷⁷ This view of the content of biblical education allows certain questions to surface: are learners aware of the impact of biblical tradition on their life experience (as for example in the wording of television commercials, to name only one)? Is this lack of awareness part of a theme of silence concerning our biblical heritage in American culture today?

The students learn that they have the power to reject that tradition in its current form. They can choose, if they desire, to rename and transform it into a more liberating form.¹⁷⁸

Finally, Freire continually insists on the unity of reflection and action. So too in liberating biblical education must this unity be maintained. Liberating education includes both elements. North Americans easily omit one or the other, focusing on verbalism or activism. Liberating biblical education should include both, not as two disparate elements, but rather as an integral unity, an inseparable process. An educational methodology that separates the two perpetuates a world view that dichotomizes reality, separating not only action and reflection, but also tradition and experience, continuity and change. It makes impossible views of reality such as those advocated by M. E. Moore and Paolo Freire.

Nelle Morton

Nelle Morton's work, The Journey is Home, is a collection of articles she wrote beginning in 1970 concerning the church, theology, and religious education in relation to

¹⁷⁸ The rabbinic story of Lillith is a good example of the ways in which women have named a story oppressive, and then adopted it, in new, imaginative versions as their own. Lillith, according to tradition, was Adam's first wife, not made from his flesh. She became bored with Adam, and left him. Her story was sometimes used to teach women their natural, "God-given" dependence on men, and the evil nature of independence. Feminists now use it as a liberation myth.

the issues of racism and patriarchy. Her writing demonstrates her growing awareness of the importance of images in shaping a theology and educational practice that would liberate rather than oppress. An image that becomes extremely important for her understanding of religious education is that of "hearing into speech."¹⁷⁹ This image grew out of her experience in women's consciousness-raising groups. There the journey toward liberation began when women's stories, complete with their anguish and pain, were listened to and truly heard by the community.¹⁸⁰ She realized that

Women came to new speech simply because they were being heard. Hearing became an act of receiving the woman as well as the words she was speaking.¹⁸¹

Three central ideas that grow out of this realization are: (1) that the process of being heard allows women to theologize out of their own experience, (2) that Silence and Hearing precede the Word, and (3) that liberation, or wholeness, is a radical journey. We will consider these in reverse order.

The first step of liberation is to realize one's oppression. Her work paints clearly the reality of oppressive patriarchy within which women (and men) live.

¹⁷⁹ First described by Morton in a sermon delivered at the School of Theology, Claremont, CA, April 27, 1977. See also The Journey is Home, 127-129.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 17.

Patriarchy splits the world: it divides mind and body, spirit and nature, inner and outer, black and white. It makes woman "the other," the less human one. Outer authority and violence maintain the patriarchal system.¹⁸²

Wholeness and liberation (Morton uses both terms interchangeably) oppose patriarchy by advocating "a oneness of body and mind,"¹⁸³ a putting together of history and nature, a concern with "the full human experience."¹⁸⁴ Liberation is not an individualistic move towards one's full potential, as espoused by the progressives. Instead, it "emerges out of one's true beginning . . . one's deepest roots" in being heard.¹⁸⁵ Liberation can only emerge out of a non-hierarchical, non-individualistic and dualistic model that "takes with dead seriousness the reality of the community, recognizing the infinite and unique value of the 'least one' within it."¹⁸⁶

The journey toward wholeness involves breaking out of patriarchy. Patriarchy organizes society, constitutes the framework of theology, and shapes even the images in our lives. To engage in the liberation journey is to confront

¹⁸² See "Toward a Whole Theology," in The Journey is Home, 65-85.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 59. See also 55, 58.

¹⁸⁶ From a conversation between Morton and the author, Fall 1984.

and shatter patriarchy. It is a radical act.

Morton's favorite words in the Bible are, "the Word became flesh." God is here, among us, now.¹⁸⁷ The Bible says that "in the beginning was the Word." But before the Word, she claims, was a Hearing, a Silence of Hearing. Morton sometimes speaks of a great ear at the center of the universe.¹⁸⁸ This image is a challenge to the interpretation of the Bible and to religious education. The image of Hearing places experience that has not been heard, such as women's experience, at the center of theology. To make women's experience central in theology is to break male hierarchical images of God.¹⁸⁹ It also leads religious education to take the role of Silence more seriously.

Morton's central concern is theology. She believes that feminist thought is a challenge to the nature and content of theology.¹⁹⁰ The speech of women that grows out of being heard is theology. We have seen that this theology is not one that starts with "the Word," but with Silence, with Hearing. It comes from the new consciousness of women growing out of "their movement in and out of

¹⁸⁷ From a conversation between Morton and the author, Fall 1984.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 55-61.

¹⁹⁰ The image of Goddess, discussed in the previous chapter, is an example of the challenge of feminist thought.

the Abyss."¹⁹¹ It grows out of the agony of their experience. Out of this new consciousness comes a new language and a new theology that destroys the old, common reality.

The new theology ushers in a new reality, a wholeness. It grows from within women, in community, and allows women to "be called into being."¹⁹² The responsibility for doing theology no longer rests on experts, church leaders, and teachers. In addition, the responsibility for human lives no longer depends on what a man did 2000 years ago. We humans are responsible. God is not outside. The responsibility and the new reality rest in us.¹⁹³ As she puts it:

Doing theology is a process of transforming images and symbols so they can function in the world in which we live, function to heal, redeem, reshape, reforge . . . we have been called to our present time and place to take responsibility for the world and for history.¹⁹⁴

For Morton, to do theology is to work with images. As we have seen in the previous chapter, images shape the intellectual framework with which we think about the world. To do theology that liberates, we must use radically new images, such as that of Goddess. Such an image acts in two ways to liberate. It shatters the old images of a male

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹² Ibid., 29.

¹⁹³ Nelle Morton, "Myths and Truths in Theology," Presbyterian Survey, Nov. 1984: 21.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

God, and the old reality carried by the old images. It then re-creates a new image, one that ushers in a new non-patriarchal reality. It requires the use of new language and a new, non-dualistic way of thinking.¹⁹⁵

Religious education is, for Morton, being heard into speech. Religious education is also participation in the community story. This participation allows one to be part of the mystery of life.¹⁹⁶ The mystery and depth that exist in life lie within us and are discovered in community. False structures and idolatrous images hide these depths, our true being. To do religious education is to hear the reality into being, out of the depths of persons. This hearing, in loving community, creates new images and language. To participate in these acts is to do religious education, and also to do whole theology.

Morton's work adds some dimensions to our quest for liberating education that are not covered by other scholars. First, she has made clear the importance of images in learning and knowing. She has strongly demonstrated the

¹⁹⁵ Morton, Journey, 147-175. Morton points out that some women make Goddess and matriarchy into female patriarchy. "The authoritarian ruler has only changed sex but the authoritarianism has yet to be exorcised from one's consciousness." *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁹⁶ From a conversation between Morton and the author, Fall 1984, in which she related the moving experience of teaching the Lord's Prayer to Down-Syndrome children. They were then able to say it with the rest of the community at worship on Sunday. The tears in the eyes of their parents, and the excitement in their faces, when they realized that they too were part of the community, was a revelation to Morton. "That," she said, "is religious education."

need for radically new ones in order to shatter old oppressive ones. Her emphasis on images makes imagination central to liberating education. Second, she has constructed a new framework for understanding the nature of education. Education only occurs when a person is heard to the depth of her being and brought to speech. The bringing to speech is the act of doing theology. Thus the split between theologians and learners, and between a theological content and learner's experience, is eliminated.

Morton leaves to us to work out all the implications of such a radical view. She suggests an apocalyptic model of education. This model is centered on community, rather than on superstar leaders.¹⁹⁷ In such a model, the teacher-student relationship must be completely rethought. Deep trust must exist between student and teacher as both hear each other. Apocalyptic education ends hierarchical dualisms such as mind-body, nature-culture, black-white, perhaps even God-human. For biblical education, Morton might encourage us to understand revelation as a hearing of the ancient text through the lens of women's pain (a concept diametrically opposed to Smart's understanding of revelation).

Third, Morton's emphasis on community raises questions concerning the identity of community today. Loving community is essential to wholeness and transformation. Where

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 58.

is this community of grace to be found today? Are not some non-religious women's groups more liberating than the church? In what ways can and does the church function in the same manner as such communities do? Morton believes that women must work separately from men for a time in order to accomplish liberation for themselves. Is biblical education for liberation possible with women if men are present?

Finally, Morton leaves us with a sense of silence and mystery at the heart of life. This mystery can never be taught, but must be experienced in the loving community of faith. Perhaps this understanding will give us the humility to know that educators cannot plan every method and outcome of the educational process. We must leave that work to the incarnate God, the great ear at the center of the universe.¹⁹⁸

Conclusion

Our probing has uncovered rich, complex thought. The purpose here is not to try to reconcile or integrate every point of view. Instead, let us lift out major issues to be considered as we formulate a pedagogy of liberating biblical education.

First, the historical-critical method utilized by scholars is a contribution that must be passed on to lay-people. The work of biblical scholars is of critical

¹⁹⁸ Morton, Conversation.

importance in understanding the Bible. This work helps to bring to life the world of the writers of biblical texts and the contexts in which they were interpreting biblical traditions. It helps to clarify the differences between the ancient interpretive contexts and the contexts of other historical and modern readers. For example, biblical scholarship describes for us the context in which Matthew wrote his Gospel. It clarifies the way in which he uses the Moses traditions in telling the story of Jesus. It helps us understand the ways in which Matthew speaks to his own context. His context can be compared with ours, in order to probe the ways in which the Matthean traditions could speak to our context.

Second, hermeneutics must be examined. This task is another step in understanding what the biblical writers were trying to say. The principles of interpretation used by the biblical authors are central to a study of the Bible. Religious educators must help students see the hermeneutical principles at work in the biblical texts. They must also guide students in understanding and choosing carefully the hermeneutical principles with which they approach the text. To continue the example of Matthew, the hermeneutic principles he uses in telling the Jesus story must be studied. Students must be aided in choosing hermeneutics to guide their application of the Matthean traditions to their own lives. Interpretive principles used by other students of the Bible, past and present, can

also be examined to deepen understanding of this Gospel. The differences in interpretations can become an interesting problem to be investigated and discussed. This investigation will bring to light again the importance of studying the context in which interpretation occurs.

Third, religious educators must work to formulate theories and methods that have a holistic and dynamic understanding of reality. Dualisms such as tradition/experience, mind/body, intellect/affect, etc., must be eliminated. They must be replaced in our educational models with more holistic concepts and images. Freire and Moore have presented two different ways of achieving such holism. Our hermeneutics must also reflect a dynamic, holistic understanding of divine and human reality. The interpretive principles with which we choose to read the Bible should reflect an understanding of the unity of reality: of male/female, mind/body, tradition/experience, spirit/flesh, etc. Such an understanding is essential to education for liberation.

Fourth, in biblical education, educational methodology and biblical hermeneutics are interrelated. Each one influences the shape of the other. Biblical education occurs at the intersection of contemporary forces of education, biblical theology, and contemporary culture. We have seen the ways in which the progressives' emphasis on experience was related to their optimistic belief in human potential and an immanent God. The neo-orthodox

educators emphasized human failure and evil in relation to God's transcendent, wholly other, nature. Their educational methodology emphasizes the centrality of biblical texts. We too must be aware of the way in which our theology is interrelated with our methodology (as Chapter 1 demonstrates).

Fifth, biblical education can only happen in community. The Bible is a community book which speaks to the contemporary community. The contemporary community, filled with the presence of the living God, also speaks to the Bible. The transformative message of the Bible will only be heard in a listening community, one that hears people into speech. This message will be also better heard in a community that transmits and interprets the traditions. One could say that this community hears the living God in the biblical communities into speech through its attention to the biblical traditions.

Sixth, biblical education must be participatory, problem-posing and dialogical. Together, students and teachers must reflect on and name the reality that is created when their experience and biblical traditions meet. Such education is an act of hermeneutics which interprets both biblical texts and personal experience. Images that shape thought in these areas are also objects of interpretation. The educational acts of reflection and naming lead to a praxis of transformation.

Our scholars have also reminded us of the importance of a variety of elements, such as imagination and creativity. Religious education must be filled with story, images, and art. It must involve thought, emotions, and action. Experiences of exploration, discovery, and decision are important. Religious education must be enjoyable.

Finally, we have been reminded that at the heart of life lies mystery and silence. God, as mystery and silence, is living in all life and work, past, present and future. At the center of biblical education lies this creative Spirit, calling, creating, linking time and space, transforming. The goal of biblical education is to make accessible transformative experiences of this Spirit.

CHAPTER 3

Gender as a Factor in Shaping
Educational Methodology

In this chapter evidence will be discussed that points to the existence of a subculture of women within the dominant culture of American and Western societies. This evidence indicates that while women participate in the larger culture, they also share some particular subcultural attributes such as values, beliefs, behavior, and a world view that are the result of their being female. This evidence also indicates the possibility that men form a subculture as a result of being male. Women's subculture, however, not men's, will be subject of exploration of this chapter. Studies of women's socialization and education, women's work, values, and ways of thinking, will be described. These studies build a picture of a world in which women live, a world that could be called a subculture.

A basic assumption in this chapter is that women often experience life differently than men. This difference of women's experience has implications for teaching methodology in religious education, implications that will be examined at the end of the chapter. Anthropologist Jessie Bernard maintains that not only is women's experience not the same as men's, but also that "the world women experience

is demonstrably different from the world men experience."¹ The different world of women can be described by investigating women's education, work, relationships, ways of knowing, and sense of self. These aspects of women's lives are intertwined with men's lives and have many similarities. Yet these aspects of women's lives also exhibit some unique attributes that point to the existence of a subculture of women.

While some anthropologists would dispute this notion, the intention here is to utilize the concept of subculture as a metaphor. Subculture is a useful heuristic device that can help more clearly articulate some of the features of women's experience. The studies discussed in this chapter bring evidence of a difference in women's experience that must be taken seriously by educators. The concept of subculture provides areas of study that can make these differences clearer and more concrete. In other words, the metaphor of subculture provides a focus and structure for the study of women's experience. This focus will be helpful in formulating methodology for women's education.

As many definitions of culture and subculture exist as do anthropologists and sociologists.² These scholars

¹ Jessie Bernard, The Female World (New York: Free Press, 1981), 3.

² A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions (New York:

would agree that culture is an important environment in which humans live, shaping their world view, beliefs, values and behavior. Culture is knowledge mediated and given meaning by symbols, of which language is the primary example. Anthropologist Judith Hansen states that "culture aids the individual in organizing perception, processing information, and solving the problems that arise in daily life."³ Anthropologists also warn that a culture is shared by a majority, not all, of the members of the group.⁴

A subculture is the culture of a minority group which is "self-consciously distinct from the dominant activities, expectations and values of a society."⁵ Members of a subculture share certain unique activities, expectations and values. At the same time, they often participate, and desire to participate, in the larger culture. For example, many American Jews are members of a subculture within American society today. They participate fully in the larger American culture. At the same time they often maintain unique sets of values, world views, family structures, and ways of understanding themselves. The boundaries of a

Vintage/Random House, 1952) provide an excellent review of some of the many definitions.

³ Judith Friedman Hansen, Sociocultural Perspectives on Human Learning: An Introduction to Educational Anthropology (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Princeton-Hall, 1979), 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ From Johnny Faragher and Christine Stansell, quoted in Bernard, 21.

subculture are fuzzy, however, Some Jews have been so completely acculturated within the larger culture that they cannot be perceived as members of a subculture.⁶ When speaking of woman's subculture, one must continually be aware that the boundaries are indistinct at times. Some women's experience may not fit this study's description of women's subculture.

Women's lives are inextricably entwined with those of men. Women are also active members of many different cultures, with different world views, beliefs, values, and symbol systems. Yet, because of their gender, women form a distinct group in every culture. Women in every culture engage in some activities, hold some expectations, adhere to a set of values that differ from those of the dominant society. Women's activities, expectations and values display some similarities even across cultures, economic classes, and ethnic groups. This paper, however, will not attempt to speak for all the women of the world. The studies surveyed mainly include North American and British women.⁷

⁶ Even Jews who do not see themselves as members of a subculture may be seen as different by the larger culture because they are Jewish. The perception of the larger culture plays a role in forming a subculture. Women are also perceived as a separate, and different, group by much of the American culture, even when they do not see themselves as different or separate.

⁷ There is intense controversy over the question of the universality of women's experience. White women, especially, need to be careful not to speak for women of

To talk about women's experience, subculture, or world, is also frequently to talk about experiences of oppression, according to many feminist scholars. To describe "women's world" is to describe an environment shaped by and formed in reaction to the reality of patriarchy. Recent studies of women's experience have therefore had two different focuses. Some studies focus on describing, as sociologist Rosemary Deem puts it, "something of the qualitative experiences and contradictory demands women are likely to meet . . ." which alert us "to the all-pervasive nature of patriarchy and patriarchal relations."⁸ In other words, the structures contributing to patriarchal oppression and the experiences of that oppression are made visible. In a second type of study, women's experiences are described in order to point out their uniqueness and value for the world today.

In both kinds of studies, the aim is to make visible that which was previously ignored in scientific studies; the reality of women's experience. The ultimate goal of these studies is to end patriarchy and the oppression of

color. Yet writings from women around the world often exhibit similar concerns. See, for example, Deana L. Eck and Devaki Jain, eds., Speaking of Faith: Global Perspectives on Women, Religious and Social Change (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987); or Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, eds., This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1981).

⁸ Rosemary Deem, ed., Schooling for Women's Work (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 4.

women. The goal of this work is the same: to make liberation and wholeness accessible to women in religious education. The description of the subculture of women brings to light some subcultural attributes that have contributed to women's oppression. At the same time, some attributes are described that are important for wholeness and liberation for all humans, female and male.

To explore a subculture is to investigate some of the activities, expectations and values of its members. This chapter will investigate these areas by summarizing studies of women's work, schooling, networks, world view, values, and the behavior shaped by these values, and ways of thinking. These aspects of women's lives are the areas which have been at least partially researched. More research is needed in the areas listed here and in other, unexplored areas.

Work

Studies show that all cultures divide some work tasks according to gender. Although work that is considered women's work varies dramatically across cultures, and covers every kind, in all cases it is considered by each culture as less valuable.⁹ Many studies have contributed an understanding of the ways in which women's work is devalued, underpaid, and isolated from the more valued

⁹ Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," Women, Culture and Society, eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974), 19.

world of men's work. In the United States, women still receive only \$.60 for every \$1.00 that men earn. The majority of women that engage in paid work have jobs in which more than 70% of the workers are women. They are part of what is often called the "pink ghetto." Most women are given work in a "secondary labor market" consisting of "jobs which are unskilled, poorly paid, temporary, and provide no opportunity for advancement."¹⁰ These jobs, and other unpaid women's activities, are considered less valuable by society.¹¹

In North American society, women's work is closely associated with the maintenance of family. Although the concept of family is a cultural one (structures and shapes of families differ radically around the world), the American family and woman's role in it are seen as "naturally" biologically determined.¹² The reality of women's experience is that women do spend much more time than men in household chores, food preparation, and child rearing.¹³ Women are also still the ones responsible for the maintenance of kinship ties, through such activities as

¹⁰ Ronald C. Federico and Janet S. Schwartz, Sociology, 3rd ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1983), 138.

¹¹ See Veronica F. Nieva and Barbara A. Gutek, Women and Work: A Psychological Perspective (New York: Praeger Special Studies, 1981).

¹² Barrie Thorne, "Feminist Rethinking of the Family: An Overview," Rethinking the Family, ed. Barrie Thorne (New York: Longman, 1982), 1-3.

¹³ Ibid., 15-16.

telephoning, writing, setting up kin gatherings, etc.¹⁴

Studies also demonstrate that families generally exhibit the same realities of the dominance of men over women as the economic world.¹⁵

Networks

People form networks of relationships with other people in different ways as their culture differs.

Bernard's work shows that women live primarily in a Gemeinschaft world, that is a "kin- and locale-based world."¹⁶ By means of networks (such as those through which baby clothes pass) and voluntary group associations, women come in contact with many different women, forming communities of support. These networks and groups demonstrate a basic "structural unit" of women's subculture: that of female friendship.¹⁷ Female friendships are at the heart of any social structure, the arteries of community. Differences between male and female styles of friendship have been observed also by this writer. These differences are apparent in verbal and non-verbal behavior, activities, and the content of discussion. However, formal

¹⁴ Bernard, 29. See also the study of the ways in which women took responsibility for kin-religious gatherings in the American South, in Gwen Kennedy Neville and John H. Westerhoff, Learning Through Liturgy (New York: Seabury, 1978), 32-57.

¹⁵ Thorne, 13.

¹⁶ Bernard, 28-29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

studies have yet to be done in this area.

Bernard claims that in the modern world friends have taken on more importance than kin.¹⁸ Women, especially married women, are discouraged from having deep relationships with men. Therefore, new groups are developing to supply affectional ties and give help in adapting to rapid social change. A woman friend seems to be valued by women even over husbands for company.¹⁹ Woman-bonding and women's networks are a sociological reality that are beginning to be appreciated by women and the larger culture.

Schooling

Society teaches girls to engage in different activities, expectations and values from boys, in part through schooling. Studies of girls' schooling demonstrate a different reality for girls than for boys. In a sociological study of girls' groups in an English school, Mandy Llewelyn confesses her difficulties in making sense of her data.²⁰ The problem, she found, was that she was using a framework drawn from a sociology based on boys. Most studies of students in school were of male groups. Data on friendship groups, academic achievement, etc., were related to the larger sociological context of family life, economic

¹⁸ Bernard, 289-297.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mandy Llewelyn, "Studying Girls at School, The Implications of Confusion," Schooling for Women's Work, ed. Rosemary Deem (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 42-51.

group, home location, etc. These studies failed to consider as important the factor of gender, the fact that the students were boys. Yet Llewelyn's studies led her to believe that gender is a crucial factor in the ways that both boys and girls experience education. Llewelyn's data did not make sense in the old framework until the factor of gender was considered. What happens to girls

is determined within certain boundaries by the very fact of their being girls, and not only by their being pupils or working class or academically successful. These latter dimensions are crucially interrelated with the very complex concept of "being female."²¹

Llewelyn found that girls judged each other according to "notions of appropriate gender behavior and characteristics."²² Teachers also taught and judged the girls according to cultural stereotypes of what was appropriate female behavior. For example, girls were judged (by both teachers and students) as "dumb" and unable to do the work because they wore clothes or engaged in other behavior considered unfeminine. The "hidden" curriculum was to transmit "ideologies of appropriate values and behavior to the adolescent working-class girl."²³ Schooling in England emphasized this curriculum, while often deemphasizing knowledge, educational achievement and skills. Deem and her colleagues demonstrate in their studies that such

²¹ Ibid., 45.

²² Ibid., 46.

²³ Ibid., 49.

gender-typing results in less education, lower-paying jobs, and less economic security for women.²⁴

Recent studies in this country also reveal the subtle ways in which girls are discriminated against in the educational system. While boys are rewarded for assertiveness, creativity, and imagination, girls are rewarded for passivity and quietness. Teachers tend to attribute boys' acquisition of good grades to their abilities. Girls' grades are attributed to effort. In college, professors interrupt women more and call on them less. This, and other unconscious behavior on the part of teachers, contributes to a low self-esteem in girls and to a lesser ability to achieve in the male work world.²⁵ Furthermore, studies of literature used in schools show that stories and pictures include mostly men, with proportionately very few women. The women portrayed are generally occupied with housework, while the men are shown engaged in a wide variety of exciting tasks.²⁶

Women, it seems, experience different expectations in the school, workplace and at home than do men. Women engage in different activities, are involved in different types of kin and friendship networks, and often do

²⁴ Deem, ed.

²⁵ Lynn Smith, "Sexism in Classroom--A Purge," Los Angeles Times, 10 Sept. 1987, sec. 1:1. See also Lenore J. Weitzman, Sex Role Socialization: A Focus on Women (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1979), 39-43.

²⁶ Weitzman, 7-11.

different work. The result of these differences has often been subordination in the form of limited choices of occupation and roles, less control of their environment, and less economic power. At the same time, feminists believe that there are some positive aspects to the values and behavior that women have learned. While working to end the oppressive aspects of women's subculture, feminists point out that there is much value for society in women's friendship networks and in their caretaking skills. These positive aspects will surface again as we turn to other aspects of women's subculture having to do with their world view and values.

World View

We have briefly looked at a system of activities and behavior that was guided and defined by the dominant culture. We turn now to a look at the world from the point of view of the members of women's subculture, that is, to what anthropologists call world view. Anthropologist Robert Redfield states that world view is a broad category that covers patterns of thought, comprehensive attitudes toward life, conceptions of what ought to be and what is, etc. He adds:

But if there is an emphasized meaning in the phrase "world view," I think it is in the suggestion it carries of the structure of things as man is aware of them. It is in the way we see ourselves in relation to all else.²⁷

²⁷ Robert Redfield, The Primitive World and Its Transformations (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1953), 86.

Redfield points out that the world view of a culture is difficult to pin down for it may easily vary from individual to individual. Yet, in general, similarities of world view do seem to exist among members of a culture, while world views differ markedly among cultures.²⁸ Within a subculture members may share a world view. At the same time, they may also carry the world view of the larger culture.²⁹ Studies of women show that women's world view especially differs from men in the areas of what is considered just and right, i.e., in the area of morality.

To get at the ways women view the world, researchers have interviewed and questioned women. Researchers have listened to what women have had to say and the way in which they said it. The assumption here is that

the way people talk about their lives is of significance, that the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act.³⁰

Women's voices have in the past only been heard in relation to men's voices. Studies in psychological and moral development have judged women's development against frameworks devised by white, North American-European, men, and based on male experience.³¹ Male adulthood,

²⁸ Ibid., 87-97.

²⁹ Redfield speculates that in today's world people may have plural world views. Ibid., 97.

³⁰ Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), 2.

³¹ Ibid., 6-14.

consisting of such psychological traits as independence, assertiveness, self-reliance, and creativity, was the norm against which women were measured. The development of morality has been viewed as growth in discerning and applying principles of justice. Some studies of stages of moral and psychological development found that many women consistently scored at "lower" levels than men. These levels were levels which emphasized relationships rather than principles of justice. These results were interpreted as indicating a less developed sense of justice, less assertiveness and maturity on the part of these women. Yet other studies indicated that women are socialized in this society to be dependent, unassertive, and relational.³²

By listening to women's voices in their own right, social scientists are revealing a unique world view for women, containing a unique ethic and system of values. Gilligan's study of women and moral conflict demonstrated that women operate from an ethic of care and responsibility.³³ Relationship, rather than right, was found as a key category of moral thinking. The women were concerned with engaging in moral actions that would not hurt others, and would be caring. Gilligan classified three perspectives of moral thinking based on responsibility and care.³⁴

³² Weitzman, 1-22.

³³ See Gilligan.

³⁴ In this work Gilligan is still utilizing Kohlberg's

The first perspective is one of survival: the moral decision must help the decider survive, even if it hurts others. The second perspective seems to be the one most advocated by the larger society: women's moral decisions must result in actions that will not hurt others, even if the woman herself is hurt. Finally, the third perspective allows a woman to include herself in the group to be cared for. A moral decision from this perspective takes into account care for others and for self, and takes responsibility for the tension and pain inherent in such a decision. Women with low self-esteem and without loving support from others seem unable to adopt this third perspective.³⁵

Women's view of the world in terms of care and responsibility has led other scholars to examine the ethic of care more closely. In an elegant study of the ethic of caring, Nel Noddings points out that women have been accused of being spiritually inferior because their lack of experience in the world.³⁶ Women have often failed to demonstrate the higher stages of Kohlberg's scheme of moral development because of their concern for care rather than

framework of moral stages. Yet with the word "perspective" she is beginning to move away from stage theory to a more processive, non-hierarchical theoretical framework.

³⁵ Ibid., 125-127.

³⁶ Nel Noddings, Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984), 46.

justice. Yet, Noddings maintains, caring is not just a manifestation of morality for women. Caring forms the very foundation of female morality.³⁷ Her study of caring tries to capture "the receptive rationality of caring that is characteristic of the female approach" which is rooted in "receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness."³⁸ Noddings demonstrates the importance of such an ethic. "To receive and be received, to care and be cared for: these are the basic realities of human being and its basic aims."³⁹ This study in the ethic and practice of caring leads her to propose "the maintenance and enhancement of caring" as the primary educational goal.

A brief ethnographic study of church women conducted by this author revealed a similar emphasis on care and relationship. Women described themselves most often in terms of relational responsibilities and caring emotions. God was also most frequently described in the language of care and relationship as friend, helper, comforter, father. God was seen as the supreme Caregiver, helping women to give care.

Values and Behavior

A system of values is at the heart of every culture. Women's subculture also has its particular set of values

³⁷ Ibid., 42.

³⁸ Ibid., 1-2.

³⁹ Ibid., 173.

that grow out of the world view of its members. Women's values, however, have often been hidden, misunderstood, or considered unimportant in the larger culture. Studies such as those by Gilligan and Noddings aim to help society attach value to what women value.

Jean Baker Miller, in a landmark study of women's psychology, also demonstrates that what women value has been hidden, relegated to the unconscious, and devalued.⁴⁰ Yet she places great importance on women's values and behavior. Behavior and values ascribed by the dominant culture to women, and seen as weaknesses, are in reality the "highest necessities" for psychological wholeness.⁴¹ Although these psychological characteristics and values can lead to subservience, they can also provide a new framework for understanding human beings. They can become a "source of strength and a more advanced form of living."⁴² Women value knowing their emotions, participating in the growth of others; they value cooperation, giving, and creativity. Even such behavior as vulnerability, weakness, and helplessness is valuable. Because this behavior is basic to the human condition, acknowledging it as a reality is more honest and can lead to strength.⁴³

⁴⁰ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women (Boston: Beacon, 1976).

⁴¹ Ibid., 25-26.

⁴² Ibid., 27-28.

⁴³ Ibid., 29-53.

Miller advocates helping women develop their strengths in a non-subservient manner. Since serving others is a main motivator for women, they must work out how to serve others as equals. They must learn to value their own power and achievement. The dominant society needs to acknowledge its devaluation of women's work and learn to listen more carefully to women's values. Miller, Gilligan, Bernard and other feminist scholars are not advocating that women remain solely in nurturing, caretaking roles. On the contrary, women need to learn some male values, such as integrity and authenticity, and to some degree, independence. At the same time, men need to be educated in the values of caring, relationship, and responsibility.

Ways of Thinking

A characteristic of culture is an identifiable, often unique, way of thinking. Sara Ruddick identifies a disciplined way of thinking that most women practice, even while they practice scientific thinking, historical thinking, religious thinking, etc.⁴⁴ She labels this kind of thought maternal thinking. Maternal thinking is characterized by an interest in preservation (keeping the other alive), growth (an acceptance of change), and acceptability (producing a child acceptable to society and oneself).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking," 76-94.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 78-86.

At the heart of maternal thinking is the capacity of attention and the virtue of love. Ruddick points out that

out of maternal practices distinctive ways of conceptualizing, ordering, and valuing arise. We think differently about what it means and what it takes to be "wonderful," to be a person, to be real.⁴⁶

Ruddick demonstrates that attentive love, central to maternal thinking, may be an extremely important virtue, having absolute value. If so, she adds, then "the self-conscious inclusion of maternal thought in the dominant culture will be of general intellectual and moral benefit."⁴⁷

Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule have also been concerned with exploring women's world view.⁴⁸ They wondered if a large number of women understand knowledge, truth, and authority in the same manner as a large number of men. They began with the belief that the conceptions of knowledge and truth that members of this American society hold are shaped by the male-dominated majority culture. Yet these conceptions define the way we see ourselves, "our sense of control over life events, and our views of teaching and learning. . . ."⁴⁹ Perhaps, they

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁸ Mary Field Belenky, et al., Women's Ways of Knowing (New York: Basic, 1986).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

reasoned, the needs of women are not being met in either counseling or education because women's conceptions of truth, authority and reality are not taken into account. Women's thought is perceived as intuitive, emotional and personalized, and of little value. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, and Tarule therefore engaged in an in-depth study of 135 women from different educational, ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds in the Northeastern United States. They probed and listened to the ways in which these women understood truth, authority and knowledge.

The researchers identified five different epistemological perspectives from which women viewed the world. They do not claim universality or completeness for these categories. Yet these perspectives shed light on ways of thinking that have previously been ignored. They believe these ways of thinking are most prevalent among women. As they describe each perspective, they compare studies of women with studies of men and find some differences in ways of thinking. They point out, however, that men may also employ some of the epistemological perspectives, especially men who do not identify strongly with the larger culture.

The first perspective they named silence. When women operate out of this perspective, they feel deaf and dumb, unable to learn. They see words as weapons, used by all-powerful authorities. They operate out of extreme sex-role typing, and have no ability for introspection. Such women are extremely isolated in their relationships, often

emotionally and physically abused. Education, in order to meet their needs, must help them connect with others and experience a sense of worth through play and dialogue.⁵⁰

The second perspective was named received knowledge. Women with this perspective learn that they can actively receive knowledge and pass it on. They are good listeners, looking for truth from authorities with expertise. Such thinkers are intolerant of ambiguity, see the world in either/or terms, and are often very literal in their understanding of the knowledge they receive. Personal support from authorities helps give these women a sense of value. Learning that their received knowledge empowers others helps women with this way of knowing develop their own voice. The authors tell, for example, of a woman who turned to a community health center to learn about child rearing. She found she understood what she was being taught and could pass it on to others. This experience helped her develop a new sense of herself as learner.⁵¹

The third perspective, subjective knowledge, is that of the woman who says, "My gut is my best friend."⁵² Truth is personal, private, intuited. The locus of authority is not the other, but the self. Such a shift is of major importance to the knower, helping her develop a strong

⁵⁰ Ibid., 24-34.

⁵¹ Belenky, et al., 35-51.

⁵² Ibid., 53.

sense of self. Education for this thinker needs to confirm her ability to think for herself, while affirming that she can know and still be a woman.⁵³

In the fourth perspective, procedural knowledge, thinkers have learned that there are different ways of thinking. They try to learn how others think, either through empathy or through working with others' rules and disciplines in order to achieve. Empathic thinkers practice "connected procedural knowing." The other thinkers practice "separate procedural knowing." Both groups learn to see through others' eyes and develop a wider experiential base for knowing. Both groups can have a problem in finding their own voice.⁵⁴

The fifth perspective, constructed knowledge, is the most complex. It allows for the integration of the voices of self and others. Ambiguity, relativism and internal contradiction are tolerated. Truth is seen as a matter of the context within which it is found. "All knowledge is constructed and the knower is an intimate part of the known."⁵⁵ Constructive knowledge for women puts caring at the center, with a commitment to relationships and to self.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid., 53-62.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 100-130.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 137.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 131-152.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, and Tarule's investigation uncovered ways of thinking about knowledge, truth and authority that had not been previously described by scholars. The research on women in this work found some similarities with research on the intellectual development of men: a progression from either/or thinking to multiplicity (awareness of a variety of views), to relativism. At the same time they uncovered some profound differences between the way women and men know the world. These differences they describe as themes: silence, listening, sense of self. Many women are so silenced as to not know themselves as knowers, or even as people capable of knowing. Women know the world through listening: whereas as men lecture and talk, women hear. Women hesitate to talk, to guide conversation, and to shape knowledge.⁵⁷ Women's sense of self is relatively weak compared with men's sense of self. They learn with difficulty to see themselves as knowers and as a source of authority. For many women, to be knowers and authorities conflicts with the image of being a woman. When women do learn to listen to their own voice as authoritative, they cling to this new sense of self fiercely. A complex, balanced understanding that locates authority and truth in both self and others is

⁵⁷ The myth in American culture is that women talk more than men. Studies show the reverse is true. Belenky, et al., 45. See also Gloria Steinem, "Men and Women Talking," Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions (New York: Signet/New American Library, 1986), 199-215.

attained by women with much struggle within themselves and with cultural stereotypes. These unique themes that describe the way women view truth, authority and knowledge help to shape a subcultural environment that separates women from the dominant culture. By describing women's ways of knowing, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, and Tarule have also opened up new questions and possibilities for women's education.

Language

Let us look briefly at language, an essential feature of cultures. In some cultures men and women display differences in language that reproduce power differences in their society.⁵⁸ Bernard demonstrates that English is hostile and denigrating of women (for example, many more terms referring to women are pejorative than are ones referring to men).⁵⁹ Words do not exist to express some aspects of women's experience.⁶⁰ In addition, the use of the same language differs between women and men. Women speak the language somewhat differently, less forcefully, with more questions. Psychologist Ann Wilson Schaef has determined that women and men define the same terms in different ways. Words like power, money, love, intimacy,

⁵⁸ See Susan Harding, "Women and Words in a Spanish Village," Toward an Anthropology of Women, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 283-308.

⁵⁹ Bernard, 375-379.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 379-390.

sexuality, friendship, commitment, etc., mean different things to women than they do to men.⁶¹ Liberating education for women must take language differences into account.

What are the implications of these studies of women's subculture for biblical education? These studies indicate some differences between women and men in the areas of work, schooling, world view, values, ways of knowing, and language. These differences are of concern to the investigator who is a woman and a Presbyterian pastor. Two-thirds of the Presbyterian congregations in Southern California consist of women. A conscious awareness of these women's subculture could help improve the quality of religious education for women.

Educational Implications

The implications of gender for educational methodology do not always look very different from current and past educational wisdom. Yet they take on a greater urgency when set in the context of teaching women. For women form a group that has often been silenced, ignored or made to feel inadequate or incompetent by society. Educational methods that arise out of this context and speak to women's needs are of the utmost importance in making liberation accessible to women.

The implications that are drawn here form strands that will be woven together more fully in the last chapter of

⁶¹ Anne Wilson Schaef, Women's Reality (Minneapolis: Winston, 1981).

this work. Within these strands similar themes and interlocking ideas will continually reappear. The study of women's subculture lead the educator to propose images and methods of education that are both compensatory and creative, healing and affirming. In other words, being part of a subculture has both negative and positive effects on women. As a subculture not valued by the larger culture, women have learned to not trust their own understandings of the world. They have learned to devalue their own intellect and values. They have not learned some verbal and non-verbal skills valued by the larger culture. Education compensates by helping women learn to trust in the authority of their knowledge and develop skills they have not learned. At the same time, a study of women's subculture reveals many values and understandings, such as care and responsibility, that are valuable and important in today's violent world. Education can help women affirm these values. It can use processes that build on women's skills of cooperation and listening.

An Important Image for
Education of Women is
the Birthing Process

For birth to be successful, a caring process is necessary. We have seen that care is highly valued in women's subculture. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, and Tarule have demonstrated the need for women to exit out of silence, finding a voice for themselves. The image of

education as a caring, birthing process suggests that this process is birth out of silence into new being. Extrapolating from the studies of women cited above, what could be born in women is an understanding and affirmation of themselves, their ethic of care and the value they place on relationships. The image of a caring birthing process has the following implications for the role of the teacher and students, and for the educational process and content.

1. The role of the teacher is to be a midwife. This ancient image of the teacher, dating back to Socrates, and used by educators such as Ross Snyder,⁶² is discussed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule.⁶³ Such a teacher sees teaching as the preservation and development of a fragile child. Caring is a central aspect of the midwife teacher's role. Noddings' image of teacher as the one-caring, the person who initiates the care relationship, deepens the midwife image. The teacher, as the caring midwife, takes the part of the student, seeing the world through her eyes. The midwife temporarily becomes her advocate in the birthing process. The advocacy role of the teacher is important, as shown by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule. Women were able to see themselves as learners and knowers when they received support from

⁶² Ross Snyder, "Encounter, I-Thou, Love, Teacher-Therapist," Ways of Learning and Teaching Inherent in Christian Existence, TS, n.p. [196-?].

⁶³ Belenky, et al., 217.

friends and authorities.⁶⁴

2. The students are to be participants in the birthing process. Their labor works in cooperation with the midwife. They also work to be midwives to themselves and each other. They are givers of care to each other and the teacher.

3. That which is being birthed is a new liberating wholeness in each person. In light of the studies discussed in the previous sections, the following elements of wholeness particularly need to be developed:

a. The deep comprehension that women are created in the image of God (imago dei). The image of a white, male God has made this understanding problematic for many women. As a result, the content of religious education for women needs to contain many metaphors for God.

b. A positive self-image. Such a goal does not imply turning educational events into therapy sessions. A positive self-image is more than a good feeling about oneself. Women need to learn to love themselves. They must learn to take themselves seriously and to see themselves as sources of authority in the search for knowledge and truth.⁶⁵ Adrienne Rich suggests that women must learn to

⁶⁴ Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, and Tarule, Women's Ways, 47-50.

⁶⁵ Adrienne Rich, "Taking Women Students Seriously," Gendered Subjects, eds. Margo Culley and Catherine Portuges (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 26.

know themselves and affirm their being.⁶⁶ Religious education can make this goal possible through a process which affirms the validity of women's experience and understandings. This process could be centered on truly hearing women's stories.

c. A feeling of competence in learning. Many women have learned to fear intellectual competence as detracting from their womanhood. Education with other intelligent women students and teachers models another, more liberating possibility: being both a woman and intellectually competent. These women need to learn that knowledge is a constructed product, in which they play a part. In addition, because women have learned in their subculture to work cooperatively, education for women would be more effective if a process of cooperative, or interactive, learning is employed.⁶⁷ As a result, education happens with rather than for women.

In sum, religious education with women can be seen as a birthing process. The teacher assumes the role of caring midwife. Students are co-participants in the birthing process, and also midwives to each other. The goal of this

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-28.

⁶⁷ The term interactive is used by Frances Maher, "Classroom Pedagogy and the New Scholarship on Women," in Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching, eds. Margo Culley and Catherine Portuges (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 29-48.

process is new liberating wholeness which is promoted by developing these elements: an understanding of self as imago dei, a positive self-image, and a feeling of competence in learning. Most helpful to these goals would be an educational process and content of hearing and story, that affirms the world view and values of women.

Dialogue is an Essential

Component of the

Educational Process

Dialogue has become a catch-word in religious education. However, genuine dialogue is not necessarily an easy task. As we have seen, women are rarely heard and often misunderstood. Women have been interrupted, silenced, and made to feel incompetent in the classroom. To truly dialogue with women an understanding of their subcultural values, world view, ways of knowing, and language would be extremely helpful.

1. Dialogue begins with a true hearing of women, until, using Nelle Morton's phrase, they are heard into speech. In other words, women, usually the listeners, are to be listened to. The educational process required in women's education must center on the act of listening to women, and helping them listen to and understand themselves. This process is engaged in by both teachers and students.

2. Dialogue starts by centering on women's experience. Experience is integral to the content of religious

education. Yet the studies of women reviewed in the first part of this chapter demonstrate that women's experience is devalued. Sharing stories and experiences is therefore an essential educational component.

3. Dialogue includes hearing the voices of the past (e.g., tradition) and present. These voices are brought by the texts, the students, and the teacher. Women especially need to hear of the thoughts and actions of other women, historical and contemporary. Because women's work has been devalued by society, the work of these women has often been hidden. The teacher has a special responsibility for introducing the knowledge about these women of history and contemporary times into the dialogue.

In sum, studies have shown that women have not been listened to truly in the educational process. Their values, behavior, and world view often have been perceived as unvaluable by society. Therefore genuine dialogue is essential to education with women. Genuine dialogue with women means a pedagogy that centers on women's experience, and allows that experience to be heard and valued. Genuine dialogue also introduces other voices to be heard, especially the voices of other women.

Critical Consciousness Must

Emerge in Liberating

Religious Education

Critical consciousness grows out of true hearing and genuine dialogue as women give words to their experience

and knowledge. Women need to become conscious of their own subculture, of their own values, work and world view. At the same time they must learn to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of belonging to a cultural group that is frequently oppressed.

1. Critical consciousness is necessary in order for women to make conscious their experiences of oppression as women. Since biblical traditions and interpretation have played an important role in women's oppression, religious education must include the development of critical consciousness. Through their own experience, and through studies such as the one engaged in in this chapter, women can learn to name the way oppression has operated in their lives. They can share together the experiences of having their work be valued as less important than a man's. They can bring to light their experiences of being interrupted and silenced in school. They can name the ways in which religion may have kept them from power and wholeness.

One dimension of oppression is the internalization of values and behavior that keep a group from achieving more power and strong sense of self-worth. A critical consciousness of oppression evaluates and names the values and behavior demonstrated by women which further oppression (as, for example, women's lack of assertiveness and independence).

2. Critical consciousness also helps women name the positive aspects of being members of the subculture of

women. The first step is for women to name and describe their beliefs, values and behavior. Utilizing the work of Gilligan, Miller, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, and others, women can develop a positive consciousness of their own voices. They can learn to celebrate their own work and values, and the work and values of other women.

3. A critical consciousness of the negative and positive aspects of women's subculture empowers women to evaluate knowledge for its ability to oppress or free women. In religious education, women must learn to evaluate biblical traditions and interpretations in this light. They can also name and analyze critically the oppression and liberation experiences of the members of biblical communities.

In sum, critical consciousness is necessary in religious education. It reveals to women the subculture to which they belong. It empowers them to evaluate the negative and positive aspects of belonging to this subculture. It equips them to evaluate religious knowledge for its oppressive and liberative power in their lives.

Women Need to be Taught

Intellectual Skills

This study has demonstrated that women's schooling has not always helped women know or value the power of their intellects. As Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule have made clear, women need to experience the power

of their own minds, and the authority of their own understandings and experiences.

1. Intellectual skills in religious education include the use of historical-critical tools of biblical research. These skills should and can be taught in religious education. An understanding of hermeneutics is also essential to biblical education and can be taught to women.

2. Women can learn to analyze the way texts and traditions from the past impact their lives in the present and could impact the future. This analysis is a step in developing critical consciousness. It is an important intellectual task that helps women understand their values and beliefs. It helps them make judgments about ways of interpreting the Bible.

3. To engage in religious education is to engage in theology. Women, through hearing, storytelling, naming and interpreting, are acting as theologians. This process of theologizing should be made conscious so that women can understand themselves as shapers of the religious tradition.

In sum, learning intellectual skills is important for women's growth. Women can be taught historical-critical biblical skills. They have the ability to analyze the impact of biblical texts and interpretations on their lives. They can be helped to see their role as theologians and shapers of the religious tradition.

Religious Education Requiresa Holistic Methodology:Intellectual, Affective,Active and Creative

Religious education deals with the whole person.

Therefore the process and content must be holistic:

active-reflective, cognitive-affective, intellectual-caring, spiritual-political. Women have been harmed by dualisms which have separated reality into parts, such as thought/emotion, mind/body, male/female, etc. In such dualisms one part has been designed as superior. Women have been linked with the part considered inferior, such as emotion and body. Religious education that is liberating cannot include these dualistic views. In order to do that, aspects of reality that were treated as inferior and that were omitted must be included again. This inclusion is not simply an adding in; it means a reworking of our basic concepts in order to see reality, and therefore education, in a holistic manner.⁶⁸ A holistic methodology of religious education could have the following dimensions.

1. Religious education requires passionate teaching.

⁶⁸ To include women into education we have separated out women's experience and made it visible. This separation could continue the dualism of male/female. Yet the emphasis on female is necessary in order to bring it back into the picture. To make female experience visible is to pose new questions about human experience. In the long run, the hope is to form a new and holistic view of human experience, male and female.

A passionate teacher

communicates that she cares deeply about what she is saying, that teaching and learning are living, and that scholarship is a standing point on a journey that recognizes other different standpoints.⁶⁹

2. Religious education requires imagination. The role of images and metaphors must be taken seriously.

At the same time playfulness can be the order of the day. Students and teachers can play with new metaphors, new hermeneutics, with new, creative reconstructions of the texts from women's points of view.

3. Religious education is filled with feeling. The importance of feelings must be made explicit. A simple example is to ask how everyone feels about a biblical text. Feelings of awe, reverence, pain, joy, dismay, grief, and anger are an essential part of religious experience.

4. Religious education is filled with history; it must include the history of women. Women need to know their own story. Society has a skewed understanding of history because of the omission of half the human race from it. To include women in history is to cause a radical change in the understanding of past events, religious and secular.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Janice Raymond, "Women's Studies: A Knowledge of One's Own," Gendered Subjects, eds. Margo Culley and Catherine Portuges (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 58.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of the way in which including the study of women in history transforms that discipline,

5. Religious education must eschew dualisms such as mind/body, spirit/flesh, intellect/emotion, private/public, feminine/masculine. This process must be made conscious. The roots of dualistic thinking in religious texts and hermeneutics need to be examined.

6. Religious education is political. Religious educators must adopt and understand the feminist axiom that the personal is political and the political is personal. To help women to feel, name, critique, analyze, interpret, and reconstruct is to engage in a praxis that impacts the political reality in which they live. These acts are dangerous, for they cause change and turmoil as well as growth.

In sum, a holistic and non-dualistic educational methodology displays passionate teaching, imagination and feeling. These dimensions of life--passion, imagination and feeling--are well known to women in their subculture. Holistic education is also historically grounded, in a history that includes women. It consciously works to end dualistic thinking. Combining all these aspects of education with competence in intellectual areas heals and empowers women to act for their own freedom in the larger culture. As a result, holistic education has a political nature.

see Robert J. Bezucha, "Feminist Pedagogy as a Subversive Activity," Gendered Subjects, eds. Margo Culley and Catherine Portuges (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 81-95.

Community is the Locus
of Religious Education
for Women

The importance of community for education is not new (see Chapter 2 of this work). Women's communities can especially display women's skills of relating and caring. These communities are bound together through rituals which further sharing, caring, hearing, hugging. They often demonstrate deep levels of care and trust.⁷¹ The creation of such communities needs to be encouraged.⁷² Feminists are calling these communities women-church.⁷³ Of course, not all women's communities are centers of trust and caring. An uncaring women's community can be dysfunctional and oppressive.

1. Only in communities of women can the goal of liberating wholeness be made fully possible. Women need each other to learn the validity of their experience, to be heard into speech, and to learn to love themselves. In being midwives and caregivers to each other, women learn to see the image of God in themselves. In the community of

⁷¹ I have observed this trust and caring in many ongoing women's groups in the church.

⁷² This is not to say that other communities are not valuable and important; they are. Communities with both women and men, young and old, are essential and growth-promoting. However, in this time and society, women experience more growth when they meet together by themselves on a regular basis.

⁷³ See for example, Ruether, Women-Church.

women-church, women can speak without comparing themselves to men. They can learn to speak as well as listen.

2. Only in community is true dialogue possible. In women's communities women feel freer to share their deep feelings and understandings than when men are present. A community of women encourages a focus on women's experience. It supports both the pain and joy that comes with this focus. When men are present, women hesitate to focus on themselves. They know, too, that women's experiences of pain and oppression make men feel defensive and uncomfortable. Women's training as caregivers lead them to suppress their own feelings and opinions to help men feel more comfortable. Dialogue can be more genuine in an all-woman community.

Dialogue with other communities is an important educational component. Religious education can help women link with other women and with other oppressed groups. White women will grow in wholeness and liberation if they hear women of different color, economic class and nationality. Women in privileged positions need to engage in genuine dialogue and active roles of advocacy for less privileged women. Women also grow as they continue to dialogue and work with men, knowing themselves as equal, competent co-workers.

3. In women's community, critical consciousness has a greater chance of developing. Some reasons for this phenomenon have been already discussed. Critical

consciousness is also more easily engaged in in a women's community because it is a difficult, often painful process.

Women are able to give each other the support needed to go through such a process.

4. In women's community, women often feel freer to be passionate, imaginative and holistic. It forms a context in which the reconstruction of history to include women is seen as important. Political strategies are more easily planned and executed in this context also.

The Religious Community

Can Learn from Listening to Women

Women know a lot about the complexities of caring, of servanthood and of the ambiguities of morality. Theologies of the past have often proved to be simplistic, irrelevant or even harmful due, in part, to their ignorance of women's experience. For example, women have been told to deny themselves and be servants in a world that denies them fullness of life and that already treats them as servants. Theologies of denial and servanthood, in themselves valuable, have served to keep women from wholeness and liberation.⁷⁴

1. Religious education can help women learn the value of their experience to the religious community, and to the world. Women can learn to critically evaluate the impact

⁷⁴ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, 18.

of major theological concepts on their lives. This kind of evaluation helps women understand the importance of using their experience to evaluate and shape theology.

2. Religious education can help the religious community listen to and value women's voices. Through religious education, the community can hear the stories of women. The community can come to understand the important role that women's values, world view, work and experience have played and could play in the faith community.

These implications enrich religious education in many ways. To take women into account in teaching religious education is to revitalize religious education for both women and men.

CHAPTER 4
A Biblical Hermeneutical Model

Three theological issues are raised when we consider the teaching of the Bible. The first is that of revelation. In what way is the Bible to be seen as revelatory of God? Is the Bible to be considered God's Word and, if so, what does God's Word mean? This issue is related to the second one, that of authority. In what way does the Bible have authority for the believer and the believing community? From whence does it derive its authority? The third issue, the problem of interpretation, springs from the first two. Given a certain understanding of the Bible as revelatory and authoritative, what hermeneutical principles should be employed in approaching biblical texts and traditions?

These problems have been addressed by many theologians. Two groups of scholars are particularly relevant to the attempt to construct a methodology of liberating biblical education. The first group is biblical scholars working in the field of canonical criticism, represented in this chapter by James A. Sanders and Walter Brueggemann. The second group is feminist scholars, specifically those working on biblical hermeneutics. Their most articulate spokesperson is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Sallie

McFague also contributes an important understanding of the role of images in theology. A critical comparison of the understanding of biblical revelation, authority and hermeneutics held by these scholars will help shape a hermeneutical model for liberating biblical education.

Approaches to Hermeneutics

James A. Sanders

Canonical criticism is the use of historical-critical methods to study the formation of canon. Canonical scholars, such as James Sanders, are interested in more than the final shape and meaning of the biblical texts and traditions. They search for the process by which texts and traditions were shaped and reshaped by different communities of faith in different contexts. They explore the dynamics which have enabled the canon to have the characteristics of adaptability and stability.

Sanders defines canon, not by what is included or excluded (for that is different for Jews, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, etc.), but by what functions as authoritative, life-giving text for the believing community.¹ His goal is to demonstrate the hermeneutic principles that shaped and reshaped the Torah. This reshaping formed a canonical text, thereby giving life and identity to Judaism and later to Christianity. The canonical texts functioned, and continue to function, to answer

¹ James A. Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972, 117-120).

the two key questions that a believing community must ask: who are we, and what are we to do?²

Sanders is fascinated by the way traditions were both preserved and reshaped to speak to new needs at new times. He recognizes that many traditions were probably not preserved. Somehow they did not speak to a new generation. He lists these characteristics as necessary to the preservation of a biblical tradition: (1) the ability to speak to a majority of the community, (2) the ability to communicate a power sought by the community, and (3) the ability of this power to meet a common need of the community, such as the need for a common self-understanding.³

Thus a biblical tradition would survive through a process that adapted it to a new setting and also kept alive in it a sense of continuity with the past. For example, in Exilic and post-Exilic times, the Torah was resignified in many different ways by the words of the prophets. These words were preserved by the community because they spoke to them in their need. In the formation of Judaism, the Torah and Prophets took on authority "from being imprinted on the corporate soul of Judaism."⁴

A biblical tradition must do more than simply survive if it is to become canon and be authoritative for the

² Ibid., 16.

³ Ibid., 18.

⁴ Ibid., 10.

community of faith. It must give life. For Sanders, the Torah story demonstrated that ability. It was adaptable, indestructible, portable, and able to speak to the questions each new generation put to it in a way that did give life.⁵ The canon, as we now know it, was shaped by the particular questions that those communities posed to the Torah, and by the life-giving answers that the communities received in new resignifications of the old traditions. In a negative sense, canon is also shaped by the questions not asked and the answers not given.⁶ Sanders states this idea forcefully:

What did not have value in more than one context simply was set aside to decay--or to be discovered by archaeologists in modern times. What is there passed the tests of the needs of numerous contexts through which the early believing communities passed.⁷

The canon's shape is thus determined by the believing communities over time. Its authority comes from the fact that it has grown out of the communities who, in the reworking of the basic Torah story, found life and identity. It has helped them answer the questions "who are we?" and "what are we do to?"

In what way is canon to be considered God's revelation? For Sanders the Bible by itself is not the Word of

⁵ Sanders, Torah and Canon, 18-20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

God. The Word of God is the meeting of the text with the community. The Word of God is, he affirms, "the point that is made in the conjunction of text and context, whether in antiquity or at any subsequent time."⁸

For Sanders, the Holy Spirit has been involved in the whole process of the formation of the biblical texts, from original speaker through what the community heard and believed was said, to final written texts and to modern interpretations in believing communities. The original words of the original speaker, such as Jeremiah or Jesus, are not what are revelatory and canonical.⁹ The books of Jeremiah, the Gospels of Jesus, are. He affirms:

The interrelation of . . . text and historical context, down to our own historical context--is the nexus of the Word of God. . . . These very human words our ancestors of faith have left us may become the Word of God over and over again as our situations and contexts change, and as the Holy Spirit wills.¹⁰

Revelation brings salvation. "To know who we are and to act like it is to experience and engage in salvation."¹¹ In other words, revelation occurs and salvation is experienced when the Bible functions in believing communities to answer questions of identity, obedience and life-style. However, these answers are not easily won. Believing

⁸ Ibid., 65.

⁹ Ibid., xvii.

¹⁰ Ibid., 78.

¹¹ Sanders, Sacred Story, 47.

communities must not simply assume that they have the mind of God. God's ways are not human ways. Salvation means being filled with God's story to such an extent that it causes metanoia, a change of mind, a fundamental shift in the way that humans see life, its problems and solutions.¹²

The issue is which understanding of God's story should be preached and taught to believing communities. Sanders points out the multivalency of the Bible. The Bible is richly polymorphous, with no one unifying theme or concept, as past scholars have mistakenly tried to demonstrate. The only unity displayed in the Bible is that of who God is: God's Oneness, or, as Sanders phrases it,, the Integrity of Reality.¹³ What unifies the Bible is a basic hermeneutical axiom: all biblical story and text work to convince the communities of God's oneness. The Bible is to be seen as a paradigm, a pattern or model, "on how to monotheize over against all kinds and sorts of polytheism, or fragmentations of truth. . . ."¹⁴

At the heart of the canon are the hermeneutical principles by which texts and traditions were adapted to different contexts by new generations. These principles were used by the biblical authors to resignify older traditions in order to give them meaning in the new con-

¹² Ibid., 52, 57.

¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

text. Such resignification brought life to the community challenged by these contexts. These hermeneutics functioned to call the community back to the one God. They allowed for continuity with the past, through the adaptation of old traditions, while also incorporating the wisdom of the rest of the contemporary world.¹⁵

Hermeneutics is, for Sanders, "the art of interpreting the Bible for ongoing believing communities."¹⁶ He draws a triangle to explain. The two points on its base represent the tradition/text on the one side, and the sociological context/situation on the other. Hermeneutics forms the apex of the triangle, allowing for adaptability/stability of text/tradition in a new context/situation.¹⁷ The axiomatic heart of this hermeneutics is monotheism: the oneness and freedom of God.

The task is to uncover the hermeneutical principles used in the Bible to affirm, with each new generation, this axiom of the Oneness of God. The hermeneutics cannot always be absolutized, for they were created to speak to specific situations. In a like manner, one interpretation of a specific text cannot be absolutized. Different hermeneutics are applied to it in the Bible in order for it to speak to different contexts. In fact, a textual

¹⁵ Sanders, Sacred Story, 94.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁷ Sanders, Canon and Community, 77.

interpretation that is absolutized can speak falsely to a new situation, e.g., the use of Deuteronomy by court prophets in pre-Exilic Judah.¹⁸ Sanders stresses this great variation within the Bible. Its pluralism allows readers to be able to always find the counterpoint to one set of ideas. He states: "Whatever cannot be found by one set of hermeneutic rules can be found by another."¹⁹ This pluralism has been important to the survival of the Bible, and the survival of communities.

The multivalency of the Bible calls for the communities of faith to read it as a paradigm. Rather than literalizing and freezing a certain historical situation, as conservatives do, or searching for the earliest, most authentic author, as do liberals, the processes adopted by the believing communities must be considered.²⁰ In this way the Bible is a paradigm, providing "guidelines for how to carry on."²¹

These guidelines are found in some key hermeneutical principles used by the biblical communities. He lists five such principles.²²

1. The Bible monotheizes: it recounts the struggles

¹⁸ Sanders, Sacred Story, 94.

¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

²⁰ Ibid., 163.

²¹ Ibid., 172.

²² See Sanders, Canon and Community, 50-60, for a discussion of these five principles.

of many generations to pursue the Integrity of Reality, God's oneness, God's presence and action in all aspects of life.

2. The Bible has a theocentric hermeneutic: it is the story of God's acts. God is seen as Creator, Redeemer, Judge, Re-creator. The Bible is less interested in human politics and social contexts, except insofar as they relate to who God is.

3. The Bible often stresses the theologies that God's grace works in and through human sinfulness. A hermeneutic of grace dominates much of the canon.

4. The Bible presents God as having a divine bias for the weak and disposed. "It is a real bias, not up for debate," stresses Sanders.²³ God works through, and demands justice for, the powerless and the oppressed.

5. The Bible adapts the wisdom of other cultures through a four-fold process: this wisdom was depolytheized, monotheized, Yahwized, and then Israelitized. Not all four steps were necessarily carried through equally well. In general, however, other traditions (such as the Creation stories) were adapted in this manner.

Two hermeneutical axioms underlie the above hermeneutical principles. God is Creator. God is Redeemer. When the first axiom is applied, God is seen as Creator of all nations, working through all peoples. The result, for

²³ Ibid., 54.

Israel, is often a prophetic critique. Israel is reminded that, although it is the chosen nation, God will and does work through other nations, in face of Israel's straying. When God is seen as Redeemer, the hermeneutics work to be constitutive, or comforting. The people are then reminded that God will not abandon them in times of pain and exile. They are offered hope. Prophets who knew which principle was appropriate, in God's terms, became the true prophets.²⁴

Canonical criticism is instructive for believing communities today. The text first needs to be heard as it was understood in its original setting. Then, it must be interpreted for today, utilizing hermeneutical principles found in the canon. In order to choose which principles, communities need to use the technique of dynamic analogy. Dynamic analogy is "attempting to hear the challenge of the prophets and Jesus by identifying with those they addressed."²⁵ Rather than moralizing first, the readers should hold the text up as a mirror, identifying themselves with those that are being challenged (rather than with those prophets who are doing the challenging). If people feel self-confident after reading a biblical passage, then they can be sure that they have misread it.²⁶ The

²⁴ Sanders, Sacred Story, 67-68, 95-97.

²⁵ Sanders, Canon and Community, xviii.

²⁶ Sanders, Sacred Story, 71.

Bible must be read in a way that affirms the freedom of God, the freedom of God to work in ways humans do not expect or understand.²⁷ This monotheizing hermeneutic may make those who are comfortable, uncomfortable. It calls for humility, humor and honesty on the part of today's biblical interpreters.

The heart of Sanders' work is his emphasis on the monotheistic pluralism of the Bible, shaped by the hermeneutical principles that pushed the biblical communities to monotheism. These principles are, for Sanders, the authoritative core of the canon. To apply these principles faithfully, it is necessary to exegete the text in its original context. He stresses that it is also necessary to exegete the current context, in order to utilize a prophetic or constitutive mode of interpretation. Clearly, Sanders believes that his context, in his time, calls for the prophetic mode, for an understanding of the freedom of God the Creator.²⁸ After faithfully wrestling with the biblical text, doing careful theologizing, humans are called to moral action.

Sanders presents a creative, dynamic way of interpreting

²⁷ Ibid., 101. He states: "Whenever the freedom of God as Creator is forgotten or denied in adapting traditional text to a given context, there is the threat of falsehood."

²⁸ As a North American, white male, professional-class theologian, Sanders' context is white male America. However, he does not clearly exegete this context in his work, except in his compilation of sermons in God Has a Story, Too.

the Bible in today's world. His stress on canon and on God's sovereignty places him firmly within the Reform theological traditions. He also holds an understanding of the need for a prophetic critique within his context in a rich and powerful nation. This view, combined with his sympathies for the powerless, help him to speak to liberation theologians. His sophisticated understanding of revelation as a process occurring in the encounter of biblical texts and believing communities is helpful. Yet, as we shall see below, his theological framework grows out of an understanding of the nature of God and the nature of canon that is disputed by feminist theologians.

Walter Brueggemann

Walter Brueggemann's theological understandings are similar to Sanders'. His work is of special interest here because of his insights on biblical interpretation. In addition, his focus on the possible implications of the canonical process for education speaks to the concerns of this study.

Brueggemann is also a student of the canonical process, of the adaptability and stability of biblical texts. He sees the canon, the Bible, as containing three basic types of writings: the Torah, the Prophets, and Wisdom writings.²⁹ The Torah represents a community ethos, the Prophets a pathos, and the Writings a logos. Each of these

²⁹ Brueggemann, The Creative Word, 8ff.

types communicate a certain mode or process of knowing, an epistemological understanding of life. Each also contains a certain substance the community is to know. This process and substance demonstrate the hermeneutics by which old and new wisdom became authoritative. They in turn have normative implications for interpreting and teaching the Bible in our times.

Torah has a narrative mode of knowing, often set in the context of worship and ritual.³⁰ Its process is dialogical, as questions asked by the child to the adult. Israel sees and understands the world through the lens of the Torah story. The story is the authoritative base in which Israel's identity is grounded. It forms the community ethos, its values and world view. This story is a subversive story: it is an alternative to the public story of the contemporary culture. For, Brueggemann points out, to tell one story is to refute and assault another one.³¹

The substance of Torah is what Brueggemann calls disclosure. Torah is the story of the disclosure of a new God. This God initiates a shift in power by becoming the new lord of a nameless rabble, a group of slaves in Egypt. The Torah is about power: the celebration of new power given to the weak, and critique of old power. The main disclosure of Torah "is of a God who makes promises and

³⁰ See Ibid., 16-39, for the discussion of Torah.

³¹ Ibid., 26.

will keep them."³² These promises rally the community to work hopefully toward the fulfillment of the promises. The yet-to-be character of the promises makes the people restless with the present, sowing the seeds of revolution.

Torah also discloses the responsibility of being a people under commandment. The commandment, that "there are no other gods before me," calls the people to exclusively hear and follow the voice of the one God. This exclusive claim of God is linked to love of brother and sister. Humans are called to a righteousness which demands hearing the commandments and promises of God, and the voice of the neighbor.³³ To be loyal in this manner initiates wonder and restlessness with things as they are. To be a people under commandment, therefore, is to be subversive.

Although Brueggemann does not focus specifically on hermeneutics, the substance of Torah that he describes reveals an interpretive principle at work. This principle is also shaped by Brueggemann's dialectic view of reality. Thus the hermeneutics of the Torah are the dialectic new God and old gods. More specifically, the hermeneutical principle could be described as that of a new, unknown God acting unexpectedly for an unknown rabble, in dialectic tension with the old gods who worked in expected ways for

³² Ibid., 32.

³³ Ibid., 34.

the important powerful ones.³⁴

This Torah story and hermeneutic call for a narrative and dialogical form of education. The learner is to initiate the questions. The community tells its story authoritatively: a story that forms the heart of its identity. Questions are asked and doubts raised only within the context of these sure memories. The story itself is not questioned.³⁵ The substance of Torah-based education is the holiness of God and the value of brother and sister.

Education which tells the story and helps the people live in righteousness toward God and neighbor is subversive. It keeps alive the memories of the shifts in power initiated by the new God, memories of oppression and liberation. It calls forth exclusive loyalties to the one holy God. It awakens restlessness with the present and hope for the future and for the fulfillment of God's promises.

Brueggemann has done extensive work on the thought of the prophets.³⁶ Prophets initiate a disruption of the existing order to bring about justice. Their writings function as part of a dialectic with the Torah, the consensus of the community, by presenting a new word from

³⁴ Brueggemann, The Creative Word, 28.

³⁵ Ibid., 17.

³⁶ In addition to Brueggemann, The Creative Word, see Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination.

the Lord which critiques the consensus.³⁷ The prophetic task is to create and nurture an alternative consciousness to that of the dominant culture.³⁸ The prophetic process utilizes and participates in the psychology, sociology, myth, and institutions of its times. These understandings are combined with a passionate agenda for the marginal in the community. The prophetic voice speaks in poetry and metaphor, with anguish, passion, and hope.

The substance of the prophets is to speak God's new, disruptive word to an unjust order. The first prophetic task is to break the numbness and silence by publicly crying out in grief. The dominant consciousness, which Brueggemann often labels royal consciousness, does not want to know what is wrong. Prophetic discourse penetrates the culture's self-deception through the use of imagination and symbol, in the poetry of grief and lamentation. Imagination is necessary to express the new reality God is bringing into being. Symbol is necessary to express metaphorically and publicly suppressed fears and terrors, the death that threatens, the anguish that penetrates current reality. Public lamentation is the first step to bring about disruption.³⁹

³⁷ Brueggemann, The Creative Word, 41-66.

³⁸ Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 13.

³⁹ Ibid., 20, 48-50.

In the midst of despair, hope is necessary. Prophets use language of symbol and metaphor to activate old subversive community memories that "have always been the basis for contradicting the regnant consciousness."⁴⁰ The imaginative and poetic language of the prophets also brings to public light the suppressed hopes and yearnings of the people. This language is a language of imagination and amazement at the work of God. It initiates new discernments and celebrations.⁴¹

The work of the prophets has some additional dimensions. It derives authority from appealing to old traditions. It tends to speak for the weak and powerless, voicing the pathos of the people, and of God. It expresses deep pain, great passion, and overwhelming hope.⁴²

The prophetic canon is rich with dialectical realities: numbness and comfort, silence and crying out, grief and joy, royal consciousness and prophetic consciousness. At the heart of these dialectics is the reality of God's justice and humanity's injustice. The role of the prophet is to express the side of the dialectic that is currently being ignored. The prophetic hermeneutic is the importance of expressing publicly the hidden aspects of reality.

The third part of the canon consists of the Wisdom

⁴⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁴¹ Ibid., 67-69.

⁴² Brueggemann, The Creative Word, 63-66.

writings, the logos of Israel.⁴³ The function of these writings was to enculturate into the ways of the community. Such wisdom comes in the form of sayings, often didactic or imperative. They transmit a wisdom which has grown out of the experience of life. This wisdom teaches the practice of patient discernment, discernment of the gifts of God. For it knows that "all wisdom is held by God alone."⁴⁴

The substance of wisdom writings has to do with living a life of discerning obedience. Such living knows that the central human task is to create and maintain community. Life is interconnected. Good living also requires good knowing. Human knowledge and ethical conduct are emphasized. Good living accepts the mystery of God. Human knowing, in other words, has its limits.

This understanding is reflected in the Psalms. The Psalms demonstrate that humans must take time for speech with God. Trust and communion with God are essential forms of obedience for the singers of the Psalms. The task of education is to teach the necessity of communion with a God who is near us, who is to be addressed as Thou.⁴⁵

The wisdom writings and Psalms carry the dialectics of human and divine knowledge, of discovery and mystery, of a God so near and a Torah so righteous. The hermeneutic

⁴³ Ibid., 69-90.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 93-101.

principle at work here is dialectical. Human knowledge is very important, and at the same time, human knowledge is limited. The mystery of God must be recognized.

Brueggemann insists on the importance of all three parts of the canon. Faithful obedience comes from teaching all three, holding them in equal tension. Torah teaches the learners to receive the community consensus. Prophets teach participation in God's disruption for justice. Wisdom teaches the practice of ethical knowing and living.⁴⁶ A life-style based on the whole canon is subversive, counter-cultural, and faithful to God.

For Brueggemann revelation and authority are to be found in the canonical process. God's revelation has been communicated through the communities of faith and carried in the canon. The canonical process is "a confessional theological act done only by those for whom everything is at stake."⁴⁷ This act has often been a subversive one, disruptive of the prevailing power structures. The educational process, in turn, "can be performed only by those who submit to the canonical process."⁴⁸

Brueggemann's basic hermeneutical understanding, as we

⁴⁶ Brueggemann, The Creative Word, 103-109.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

have seen, is that reality, human and divine, is dialectical in nature. He underscores the many dialectics in the canon: beginning and ending, dying and new life, suffering and hope, lament and doxology, old revelation and new revelation.⁴⁹ Other dialectics are: land as promise and as problem, royal knowledge and prophetic knowledge, darkness and light, slavery and freedom.⁵⁰ Each part of the dialectic is part of reality. At the heart of Israel's reality is a God so near and a Torah so righteous. Yet Israel often emphasized only one side, thus distorting reality and leading to unfaithfulness. We moderns are tempted to do the same.⁵¹ By employing the dialectics present in canon, we can unearth that which has been silenced in our contemporary communities. We thereby initiate a revelatory process of subversion and a movement toward more faithful righteousness and justice.

Brueggemann's emphasis on a dialectic hermeneutics and on the subversive nature of canon introduces an important prophetic understanding of hermeneutics in the North American context. However, he, like Sanders, operates out of an understanding of canon that would be disputed by some feminist theologians.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁰ See also Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

⁵¹ Brueggemann, The Creative Word, 115.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's work provides the most important feminist response to the work of biblical scholars such as Sanders and Brueggemann.⁵² Fiorenza is a leading biblical scholar and historian herself. Her work focuses on the same questions as those raised above, questions of biblical authority, revelation, and hermeneutics. At the same time she speaks from a feminist, liberation perspective. Thus a survey of her work in this chapter can become part of a dialogue about similar biblical theological issues from different perspectives.

Fiorenza digs quickly to the root of the difference between her feminist understanding and that of other scholars by pointing to the basic paradigms out of which each operate. A paradigm is a pattern or model for a way of thinking and constructing meaning. It "represents a coherent research tradition and creates a scientific community."⁵³ The paradigm that guides each generation of researchers is historically conditioned, not value-neutral. A paradigm demands commitment to its understandings on the part of scientific researchers.⁵⁴ Liberation scholars point out, furthermore, that intellectual neutrality is

⁵² Her two most important works in this regard are In Memory of Her and Bread Not Stone.

⁵³ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

impossible in a world of oppression. Therefore all paradigms involve commitments that are either for or against the oppressed, knowingly or not.⁵⁵

A feminist scholarly paradigm must, as a result, clearly take an advocacy position for women who are oppressed. Other paradigms of biblical interpretation have also had commitments they advocated, yet these have not always been clearly visible. A doctrinal paradigm of biblical interpretation has been an advocate for church dogma.⁵⁶ An historical-critical paradigm has been an advocate for the academic community's understanding of historical study as objectivist, value-neutral, and rational. This academic community has had few ties with the church and the communities of faith.⁵⁷

A third paradigm is a pastoral-theological one that would integrate these two competing paradigms, and allow for avowed advocacy for women.⁵⁸ This paradigm utilizes historical-critical tools to get at the many theological traditions in the Bible and to understand them as responses of faith in their historical context. At the same time work must be done to "set free the liberating traditions of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 25-28.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 28-32.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 32-42.

the Bible" to speak to the communities of faith today.⁵⁹ Such a paradigm understands that not all parts of the Bible speak to today's communities. Therefore its understanding of canon is different from that found in other paradigms.

Fiorenza's probe of paradigms demonstrates that she and the canonical scholars are not initially very different. Sanders and Brueggemann also call for utilizing historical-critical tools to understand the varied contexts that produced the many traditions in the Bible. They too believe that careful hermeneutical choices must be made in order for the Bible to speak God's Word to today's communities of faith. They too take an open advocacy position for a prophetic critique of the comfortable, and freedom for the oppressed.

Yet Fiorenza's advocacy of women radically shifts her understanding of revelation and canonical authority away from that of Sanders and Brueggemann. To advocate for women is to critically evaluate all biblical texts "in order to determine how much they contribute to the 'salvation' or oppression of women."⁶⁰ She states,

the litmus test for invoking Scripture as the Word of God must be whether or not biblical texts and traditions seek to end relations of domination and exploitation.⁶¹

For Fiorenza, the canonical process is not a source of

⁵⁹ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, 32-33.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

revelation and authority guided by the Holy Spirit. Many of the choices of texts and traditions were made by men, within patriarchal cultures. These texts and traditions functioned in the past, and still function in the present to legitimize the oppression of women. The Bible must be understood as "the words of human authors, especially as the work of men."⁶²

The revelation of God's nurturing presence is to be found, not simply in biblical texts, but in the struggles of women to be free and to be themselves. The locus of revelation is "women-church," past and present. Fiorenza defines "women-church" as "the movement of self-identified women and women-identified men in biblical religion."⁶³ "Women-church" is "the dialogical community of equals in which critical judgment takes place and public freedom becomes tangible."⁶⁴

The Bible is seen as both a source of liberation and oppression. It is therefore placed under the authority of women's experience of struggle for liberation. It must be approached critically, not as an authoritative source, but as a resource.⁶⁵ The Bible is to be seen as a root-model of the church, rather than as an archetype to be imitated

⁶² Ibid., x-xi.

⁶³ Ibid., xiv.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 12-14.

closely. Past communities of faith saw revelation as ongoing, allowing for reinterpretation of traditions. Seeing the Bible as a root-model allows this understanding to continue, as the women-church of the present critically studies and evaluates it.⁶⁶ Revelation is also seen as emerging from other texts, those that have been suppressed, left out of Scripture, used in other traditions, or are being written today.

Fiorenza's thought is in some ways an extension of Sanders' and Brueggemann's work. Her understanding of the Bible as a root-model is similar to Sanders' idea of the Bible as paradigm. Her advocacy of women is a logical extension of Sanders' and Brueggemann's support of a prophetic critique that demands justice for the weak and powerless. Her recognition that biblical texts can be oppressive is, to some extent, an echo of their emphasis on the multivalency of the Bible.

The basic understanding that the Bible is written by patriarchal men, however, disputes these scholars' notion that revelation is found in the canonical process. Fiorenza asserts that the canonical process itself must be challenged as having often been guided by patriarchy. Rather than giving authority to the encounter of the communities of faith with biblical traditions, Fiorenza locates authority first in the struggles of women. Only

⁶⁶ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, 36-40, 88.

the traditions in the Bible that connect with these struggles have the possibility of carrying authority for women. Revelation is located "in the experience of God's grace and presence among women struggling for liberation from patriarchal oppression and dehumanization. . . ."⁶⁷

These understandings of the Bible and revelation lead Fiorenza to propose four hermeneutics with which to study the Bible. These hermeneutics grow out of this basic concept, "understanding a text depends as much on the questions and presuppositions of the interpreter as on material explanation."⁶⁸ They are also based on certain scholarly and feminist presuppositions. First, as an historian, she demonstrates that the study of history is never objective. Rather history is always history for as well as history of peoples. A study of historical discourse demonstrates that history has usually been written by and for the winners. What is required is not value-neutral history, but historical discourse which brings to public consciousness its values, commitments and presuppositions.⁶⁹ The same is true for biblical interpretation. Feminists need to be actively involved in writing history and biblical interpretation in such a way that the losers are not only included, but that the story

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

is seen from their point of view. This method also helps us to understand that biblical history and biblical theology form "historical rhetoric for believing communities."⁷⁰ This perception "allows for a feminist-critical interpretation of the Bible as an historical rhetoric for women-church."⁷¹

The first hermeneutical principle to be employed in studying the biblical text is a hermeneutics of suspicion. This hermeneutics grows out of an understanding that the texts, and the past and contemporary interpretation of the texts, have been partial; that is, male experience has been understood as representative of human experience. They have frequently been exclusive of women. They have also been biased, for they have grown out of male sociopolitical contexts.⁷² A hermeneutics of suspicion allows students to clear away some patriarchal mistranslations, interpretations, and reconstructions. This hermeneutics also clarifies the androcentric and patriarchal tendencies of the canonical process. It searches out patriarchal and androcentric presuppositions and models in contemporary interpretive scholarship.⁷³

At the same time, a hermeneutics of suspicion calls

⁷⁰ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, 105.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 107.

⁷³ Ibid., 16.

for the use of historical-critical tools to present "an alternative interpretation of biblical texts and history for public scholarly discussion and historical assessment."⁷⁴ Biblical texts must be explored and reconstructed as clearly situated in their historical-ecclesial-social contexts. One is thereby able to see both the patriarchalizing trends and the egalitarian-inclusive trends within texts more clearly set in certain historical-political contexts.⁷⁵

Secondly, Fiorenza calls for a hermeneutics of proclamation. This hermeneutics "assesses the Bible's theological significance and power for the contemporary community of faith."⁷⁶ It announces that patriarchal texts, and texts oppressive to women, are not the Word of God. They are not to be included in the lectionary or be proclaimed as revelation in Christian worship or catechesis. Texts that reveal God call women to participation in a discipleship of equals. The community gathered around Jesus is a paradigm of this discipleship of equals. This community was a witness to God and embodied the praxis of inclusive wholeness for women and men.⁷⁷

All texts must also be evaluated for their effect on

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁷ Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, 118-154.

women in contemporary patriarchal culture. For example, the way in which the biblical commandment to love is misused to encourage women to stay in an abusive marriage must be considered. Texts that are liberating, providing a vision of human freedom and wholeness, should be central in the worship and educational life of the church. A hermeneutics of proclamation, in short, is a careful theological evaluation of biblical texts in terms of women's wholeness and liberation.⁷⁸

Fiorenza does not, however, "throw away" the androcentric biblical texts. They are important to a hermeneutics of remembrance. A hermeneutics of remembrance is the "recovery of all biblical traditions through an historical-critical reconstruction of biblical history from a feminist perspective."⁷⁹ A hermeneutics of remembrance looks for the story of women in all texts, whether they are mentioned or not. It allows women to reclaim the struggles and pain of their foremothers which has often been silenced and forgotten in history. Through a hermeneutics of remembrance, a "dangerous memory" is created. The past and its oppression is remembered. This memory keeps alive the sufferings and hopes of women in the past, and creates solidarity among women today.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid., 18-19.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 19-20.

A hermeneutics of remembrance calls for the reconstruction of history in such a way that women are placed at the center of biblical community and theology. In other words, the roles and viewpoint of the women who were participants in the historical situations are a central focus of the reconstructed history.⁸¹ To look at the texts from the women's point of view is to break the silence of women in the biblical texts and traditions. The hermeneutics of remembrance refuses to take the silence and absence of women in the texts as proof that they were not present and active. Rather it understands this absence as the result of androcentrism. Clues in the text of women's activities are carefully searched as indicators of a different historical reality.⁸²

Finally, a hermeneutics of creative actualization is necessary. This hermeneutics allows the retelling of biblical stories from a feminist perspective. In the same way that biblical stories have inspired legends and artistic expressions, women need to use imagination, story and art to celebrate the stories of biblical women. New images and symbols are to be brought in to rename God, Jesus, the women who were disciples, missionaries, apostles. Litanies

⁸¹ To put women in the center of history is not to push men out of the center. Feminists point out that for women, "center" is an image of an area which can be expanded to include more people. For men, center often is an area which excludes a large portion of people. See Schaeff, Women's Reality, 124-151.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 112.

of praise and songs of mourning for women's foresistors are to be shared.⁸³

Sanders' concept of dynamic analogy has similarities to the hermeneutics of remembrance and creative actualization. Dynamic analogy suggests that the reader put him/herself into the text, identifying especially with those who are being challenged. Sanders' call to identify with those who are being challenged supports his understanding that God is biased for the oppressed. He assumes his readers are not oppressed, and that they need to be challenged to support the oppressed, an assumption that is often correct. He fails to acknowledge that some of his readers might be part of an oppressed group and need a word of comfort, rather than of challenge. He fails to overtly name women as oppressed. Therefore his prophetic critique does not go far enough to be fully liberating to women.

Fiorenza's hermeneutics of remembrance and creative actualization are also reminiscent of the way Brueggemann describes the prophetic writings. Perhaps this fact is illustrative of a basic difference between his hermeneutics and Fiorenza's. In spite of his dialectical approach, in spite of his insistence on hearing the prophetic voice, Brueggemann works within a closed system--a canon fully formed. He claims that to work within this closed canon is radically subversive. Fiorenza would claim, that for women,

⁸³ Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, 21-22.

the canon is not subversive enough.

Brueggemann and Sanders do not deal with the possibility of a flawed, biased canonical process that itself is oppressive. They are not able, within their framework of revelation and canon, to bring a prophetic critique to the canon itself. Sanders believes the critique of some biblical texts comes from other biblical texts. Fiorenza points out, however, that no explicit condemnation of patriarchy and androcentrism exists in the biblical texts. Critiques of patriarchy are sometimes extrapolated from biblical texts about justice or oppression. Yet the origin of the critique has come from outside the canon, from women's experience and other non-canonical texts.

Fiorenza's four hermeneutics enable the proclamation of a living God, freed from the restraints of a patriarchal and androcentric canon. They give life in a way suggested by Sanders: they help communities of believing women to "know who we are and to act like it."⁸⁴ They help the salvific revelation of a loving God to break through. They bring to light a God who is woman-identified and nurturing. In emphasizing the sovereign, righteous Creator, Sanders speaks to the community of the powerful, i.e., to men. Sanders' discussion of God the Redeemer, which emphasizes grace for the sinner, is more a word to those who have missed the mark rather than to those who

⁸⁴ Sanders, Sacred Story, p. 47.

need to be rescued. Women, of course, do also need the word of God's righteousness and grace. The word of salvation for women at this time in history, however, requires hermeneutics that actively advocate the liberation of women. Woman-identified images of God also deepen and enrich hermeneutics such as these.

Fiorenza's hermeneutics develop a dialectical understanding of the Bible as revelation: the Bible does carry revelation and the Bible does not carry revelation. When the liberation and wholeness of women is proclaimed or demanded, it is revelatory. When it promotes women's self-denial and oppression, it hides God.

Fiorenza's understanding of revelation is radically different from Sanders' and Brueggemann's because she sees as primary the experience of women's struggles for wholeness. Women's experience is the first hermeneutic source. When the Bible is approached through women's experience of inequality, it can be revelatory by presenting a paradigm for a discipleship of equals. God is revealed in the search for and praxis of inclusive wholeness. This revelation can be disclosed in women's experience, canonical texts, and non-canonical texts.

Fiorenza could be critiqued by Sanders for the lack of monotheizing hermeneutics. A hermeneutics of suspicion may not see God's work through Pharaoh as well as Moses. In other words, a hermeneutics of suspicion names events, interpretations, actions, etc., as evil and godless. Yet

this naming of evil can obscure the hermeneutics of God's grace, working through sin. Parts of reality could be visualized as not being a part of God's reality. This understanding destroys the unity of reality and the oneness of God. It could undermine the concept of God's grace and the sin in all of humanity. However, evil does need to be named. Sanders and Fiorenza both agree that grace cannot be an excuse for evil. A tension always exists between decrying evil and proclaiming God's grace. Sanders has a stronger view of God's grace. Fiorenza has a deeper understanding of patriarchal evil. The difference in views need not be resolved, for the tension is real. The differences may come from the difference in each scholar's context, and the amount of oppression experienced by each.

Sallie McFague

Hermeneutics are conceptual principles. At their heart lie metaphors. We construct our world with metaphors, states theologian Sallie McFague.⁸⁵ Then we forget we do so. All language is metaphorical, although we are usually not conscious of it.⁸⁶ In order to be theologians for our time, we must utilize new metaphors. We "must think experimentally, must risk novel constructions."⁸⁷ Many biblical theological metaphors have become idolotrous

⁸⁵ Sallie McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 5-6.

⁸⁶ Sallie McFague, Metaphorical Theology, 16.

⁸⁷ McFague, Models of God, 6.

and irrelevant in our context.⁸⁸ Many are downright dangerous in an age of pollution and nuclear weapons.⁸⁹

McFague suggests new models for God that would create healthier, more holistic views and life-styles in the contemporary context. She proposes the metaphors of God as mother, lover, and friend of the last and least of all creation, modeled on the world as God's body.⁹⁰ To use these metaphors is to characterize God's love as radically intimate. These metaphors bring out the life-creating, healing, nurturing, sustaining aspects of God. They create a model for a life-giving, loving, and healing human life-style.⁹¹

McFague's work suggests three tasks that must accompany the hermeneutical task. First, we need to be aware of the metaphorical nature of our language, and of our understanding of God. Second, we must deepen the metaphors we employ to describe God and humanity. We claim, for example, that God is Creator and Redeemer. In what way is God like a creator? We have seen some differences in images between Sanders and Fiorenza. For Sanders, God is free, righteous, Creator, the unity of reality. For Fiorenza God is the nurturing, woman-identified, Creator.

⁸⁸ McFague, Metaphorical Theology, 4-10.

⁸⁹ McFague, Models of God, xii, 7-8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapters 4, 5, 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 91-95.

What additional metaphors could shape this image of Creator? What do these metaphors say about what God is not? Third, we need new metaphors for God and for humanity. The Bible provides many metaphors. We must search them out. Poetry, art, our own lives, are all sources of new metaphors. Holistic, healing metaphors, combined with liberating biblical hermeneutics are essential for liberating biblical education.

Conclusion: Biblical Hermeneutics
for Liberating Education

The choice of hermeneutics, as we have seen, is shaped by several factors. The ecclesial-historial-social-political context of the interpretive community is an important factor which must be made explicit. Our understanding of the Bible as revelation and authority is determined by this context and needs to be stated. The context also determines the questions brought to the Bible by the believing community as it searches for salvation. These questions, and the understanding of salvation, play a large role in the hermeneutics with which we approach the Bible. At the same time, our knowledge of biblical understandings of God, and of past and contemporary hermeneutics, also shape our searchings. We are indeed, as Mary Elizabeth Moore has demonstrated, standing at intersections of past and present, of present and future.⁹²

⁹² Mary Elizabeth Moore, Education for Continuity and Change.

A Context

The context within which this author writes is that of a Protestant clergywoman, living and working mostly with white, middle- and professional-class women in the United States. Ecclesiastically, her ordination indicates a commitment to the Reformed branch of the church. The social and political context is one of affluence, power and privilege, especially in relation to the rest of the world. At the same time, this context includes oppression brought on by gender, as described in the previous chapter. Past interpretations of biblical traditions have kept women's history silent, or have rendered it oppressive. These interpretations are an important part of the context which needs healing.

At this intersection of past and future, a hermeneutical model must speak to this context in a liberating manner. The hermeneutics involved must be both constitutive and challenging in order that the liberative journey might be accessible, not only to white North American women, but also to other more oppressed groups of women.

The Bible as Revelation

and Authority

This context calls for a dialectical understanding of the Bible as revelation: the Bible reveals God and the Bible hides God. The Bible reveals God in texts that encounter communities of women and give them life. At the same time, when the Bible is made to justify and support

oppression, then it hides God. It makes salvation inaccessible to us. Salvation, for Sanders, is "knowing who we are and how we are to live."⁹³ For women, salvation is to know themselves as fully children of God, created in God's image, deserving of equality, power and wholeness. Salvation is to find "God in ourselves," and "to love Her fiercely, to love Her fiercely."⁹⁴ Salvation for women is to live on the liberation journey, with God and humans as partners.

The Bible has authority insofar as it speaks to experience, especially to the experience of women struggling to be whole and free. This understanding has, realistically, been the working understanding of most Christian people. The danger is that a narrowness of experience will narrow the understanding of God. It could keep one from hearing and understanding the call for justice and righteousness.

We must therefore qualify this idea in two ways. First, the experience of women's struggles has been so silenced that it has rarely been seriously taken into account. Exegesis must take place for both biblical text and contemporary context, as Sanders has pointed out.⁹⁵ The context here must be women's experience of struggle for

⁹³ Sanders, Sacred Story, 47.

⁹⁴ Ntozake Shange, For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf, quoted in Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, xvi.

⁹⁵ Sanders, Canon and Community, 67.

freedom and wholeness. Secondly, the experience to which the Bible must speak is that of all women, poor and rich, of every color, in every nation, of every socioeconomic class. This experience must include the more painful side of experience, the struggle.⁹⁶ Women who live in one context need to hear the voices of women from different contexts. Such hearing will broaden our understanding of women's experience and of the nature of God. It will enable us to bring a prophetic voice into our own situation.

Hermeneutics for Liberating

Biblical Education

Women living in the United States experience a dialectical reality. They experience both power and lack of power, voice and silence, comfort and pain, God and no God. Some of the hermeneutics proposed by our scholars work together in a similar dialectical manner, reflecting women's experience of life and of the Bible. Women's experience shapes some of these hermeneutics. Other hermeneutics grow from the way traditions are interpreted in the Bible. The choice of these hermeneutics grows out of the encounter of the experience of contemporary women with the experience of the biblical communities.

The first dialectical hermeneutic is a hermeneutic of monotheism and suspicion. "Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one

⁹⁶ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone.

God." The Bible witnesses to the existence and faithfulness and love of the one God. Our lives are given meaning by this reality testified to in the Bible. No part of reality does not include God. God is the Integrity of Reality.

At the same time, women know that the Bible was written by men, within patriarchal cultures. Women therefore approach all biblical texts and traditions with suspicion. God's love for women is not always evident. Biblical texts and traditions that promote the pain and silencing of women do not reveal that God wants pain and silencing for women. They reveal instead the ways in which God is hidden by human, patriarchal structures, ideas, interpretations, and actions. When the biblical texts advocate laws, structures, ideas, etc., that harm and enslave women (and all humans), they hide God.

The second dialectical hermeneutic is a hermeneutic of remembrance and of anticipation. This dialectic brings together the past and the future. It brings them both into the present moment. Through the hermeneutic of remembrance, the stories of women past are re-created. Their sufferings and their hopes are heard. God's work among and through women is uncovered. The hermeneutic of remembrance also brings to mind the women whose stories will never be heard, because they were not remembered. Biblical texts that do not mention women are searched for clues that women were present. The texts are re-created with the presence of

women. Finally, the historical situation to which the biblical texts speak is reconstructed from the point of view of the women who were historical participants (see page 208).

Through the hermeneutic of anticipation, God's unexpected acts are identified in biblical texts and anticipated in our lives. The radicalness of God, working through women, is explored in the past and anticipated in the future. The present is shaped by both the remembrance of the past and an eschatological anticipation of the future.

This hermeneutic also carries the possibility of new images and models of God. In remembering and anticipating God's work, new metaphors, or old forgotten ones, can be created or reclaimed. Metaphors that shatter oppressive images of God and reveal God's liberating work play an important part in shaping this dialectical hermeneutic. The new, subversive God of powerless women can be imaged, named and anticipated.

A third dialectical hermeneutic grows out of Sanders' hermeneutics: God's bias for the oppressed and God's grace working through sin. These two hermeneutics form one reality. God sides with the powerless and the oppressed, the orphan and the widow. At the same time, God works through evil. God works through Pharaoh's autocracy, Jacob's trickiness, and Abraham's disbelief. Women, and other oppressed groups, have difficulty seeing this side

of God's grace. This grace has often been used as justification by oppressors for continuing oppression. Only the oppressed have the right, and the obligation, to remind each other that God can work through the evil in their situation. They must not equate God's ability to work through evil with God's desire for them to experience evil. For God does not desire evil, but justice. God personally identifies with the least, the most powerless. In this context, the oppressed must be named. God identifies with women who struggle for liberation and wholeness. God also can work through the evils of patriarchy, racism, and classism to bring about freedom. This dialectical hermeneutic is of key importance for understanding the Bible.

A final dialectical hermeneutic is women's knowledge and God's mystery.⁹⁷ Humans live in the reality that knowledge gained through experience is revelatory and valuable. Women are only beginning to understand this truth. Women must know their experience deeply. They must proclaim it, listen to it, trust it. Women's experience reveals the nature of reality. Women's experience reveals the nature of God.

At the same time, the mystery at the heart of the universe will never be grasped. As a result, humans can always learn more, grow more, and find new questions.

⁹⁷ This idea comes from Brueggemann's comments on Wisdom in The Creative Word, 69-90.

Woman's experience is limited in many ways. Women do not know the minds and hearts of all other people. They do not understand the mysteries of life. The awareness of mystery should function as a challenge to search and probe and question, rather than to silence and close down the mind. It calls up awe, reverence, and hope.

The hermeneutic of knowing and mystery empowers women to love themselves, God and neighbor. It opens up the possibilities of new ideas and questions as women grow in knowledge. It allows feelings of joyous mystery to flood the soul.

The Bible as Paradigm

Paradigm has been defined as a pattern, or model, of a way of thinking and constructing meaning. Sanders and Fiorenza agree that the Bible is to be understood as a paradigm, a pattern or model. The biblical texts and traditions are continually open to being newly interpreted, just as they were in the ancient biblical communities.

The Bible models the way in which these traditions can be adapted in a new context. The hermeneutics that the ancient communities used are simply patterns and pointers for the modern communities of faith.

However, differences between Sanders and Fiorenza have emerged in this chapter. These differences are also evident in their understanding of the Bible as paradigm. Sanders operates, for the most part, within the closed canon. The Bible becomes a paradigm by presenting the

traditions and hermeneutics that the ancient communities utilized. The choice of the modern communities comes in deciding which of these traditions and hermeneutics are most adequate to transmit God's revelation in this time.

Fiorenza, on the other hand, starts with women's experience. Women's experience is the final authority. Traditions are remembered or proclaimed in today's communities as empowering or oppressive. The hermeneutics by which they are interpreted grow out of women's experience. The Bible thereby becomes a pattern for both liberation and oppression. Non-biblical traditions are also discovered or created by women's communities. Sometimes they are woven in with the biblical stories. Stories of Lillith, Judith, Junia, for example, are added to and incorporated into women's traditions. In Fiorenza's concept of the Bible as paradigm, the canon is not really closed. New canon is continually being formed.

The contrast between Sanders and Fiorenza has been emphasized in order to make clear some basic conceptual differences. Yet both scholars are more flexible than this discussion may indicate. Sanders accepts appropriate creative reinterpretation of Scripture based on experience. Fiorenza is guided by biblical hermeneutics as well as women's experience.

This flexibility suggests an understanding of Bible as paradigm that can be useful for liberating biblical education. The Bible is paradigmatic only when standing at the

intersection of contemporary experience and past tradition. That is, the experience of the contemporary community and the ancient communities have equal weight in guiding the choice of traditions and interpretive principles. The Bible is a model of this same kind of intersection in the past: the meeting of a community with an old tradition. It can function paradigmatically today when it meets the contemporary faith communities of women. In this meeting, the Bible can and will be transformed. The canon becomes open for women's communities. At the same time, the community can also be transformed as it searches the traditions in the light of its experience. The four dialectical hermeneutics allow the Bible to function paradigmatically in this encounter and open the door for the revelation of God's liberative Spirit.

CHAPTER 5

A Methodology for Liberating Biblical
Education with Women

A methodology for religious education establishes a pedagogical goal. It states the context for which the methodology has been developed. It delineates a process and a content. The pedagogical theory that undergirds it is made explicit. This methodology also describes the role of the teachers and students.

In this work we have explored ideas for methodology for biblical education. In Chapter 1 we have described essential features of our goal of liberation. In Chapter 2 we have reviewed pedagogical theories for teaching biblical texts and traditions. In Chapter 3 we have explored the context in which this methodology must function. We have explored the psychological, sociological, spiritual, and intellectual contexts of women who are the learners with whom we are concerned here. In Chapter 4 we have focused on the central issue of any biblical education, the issue of hermeneutics. We must now weave together these many, richly-colored strands to form the bright tapestry-picture of a methodology for liberating biblical education with women.

The Goal

The goal is to make accessible the radical journey of

liberation. The learner chooses to learn, to change, and to grow into wholeness and freedom. Liberation cannot be a guaranteed outcome of a pedagogical method. Therefore, a methodology can only make liberation accessible. Many do not want to change or grow. They may even choose conversion to less freedom and less wholeness. We would hope, however, that a sound methodology would encourage growth toward liberation as a desirable goal.

Liberation scholars have demonstrated clearly that education which does not aim for liberation could, consciously or unconsciously, promote oppression. Educational systems are controlled by those in power. They tend to protect the status quo, the current balance of power. They enculturate students into the values, beliefs, and world views that support the powerful and silence the powerless. Religions can be the most powerful protectors of those in power. They often give divine legitimization to the current political, economic and social structures. In this way they add to the oppression of the silenced, the powerless, and the marginal in society.

Religious education in this country has, for the most part, optimistically assumed that it promoted the wholeness and happiness of all people. It has been blind to its own biases of color, gender and class. It has attempted to become more scientific through the use of theories in the fields of psychology, education, and biblical criticism. In so doing, religious educators have often adopted the

widely-held beliefs that these theories were objective and value-neutral.

We are only now beginning to understand the subjectivity of all inquiry. Some religious educators are starting to admit to the possibility of white, male, academic-class bias in this field. The recognition is growing that this bias can make women, people of different socioeconomic classes, and people of different colors, invisible and unheard. Unless the realities, experiences, and needs of silenced groups are taken into account, religious education can also play an oppressive role.

Therefore we must develop religious education methodologies with liberation as a goal. The concern of this work is the liberation of women. Women form the majority population in our churches, yet the uniqueness of their voice has not been heard. The context this work addresses is middle-class, white, United States women. It may speak less strongly to women of different color, socioeconomic class or nationality, yet this author believes that the common factor of gender gives women much in common, in spite of other differences.

The goal of liberation is especially important when we teach the Bible. Biblical texts and traditions have been used as a major tool to support the silencing and oppression of women (1 Corinthians 14:34, 1 Timothy 2:11-12). The Bible has been quoted to promote the understanding of woman as basically evil (Genesis 3, 1 Timothy 2:14, etc.).

It has been, and often still is, employed to justify women's low economic status, narrow role definition, and lack of social and political power (Ephesians 5:22-24).

It has been, and still is, cited as the reason for keeping women from ordination and power in the church (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus). Until we deal directly with the biblical texts, and their interpretations, women will continue to experience oppression by the Bible.

At the same time, many women have experienced the Bible, or parts of it, as a source of liberation. Biblical women, such as Sarah, Mariam, Mary of Nazareth, and Martha, have served as role-models of leadership and strength. Jesus' relationship of equality with women has shone through the many dark layers of patriarchal interpretation. God's call for wholeness, freedom, justice, and peace has been transmitted by the Bible. This call has given courage and hope to women in their struggle. God's desire for humankind is described in the Bible as the desire for humanity's liberation from evil, oppression, disease, injustice and war.

The goal, thus, is liberation. Chapter 1 describes four elements that characterize liberation: (1) liberation is a journey of radical transformation, (2) liberation requires transformative images, (3) liberation requires critical consciousness, and (4) liberation is experienced in liberative community.

The nature of the goal plays a central role in determining educational methodology. The features of liberation just described here have important educational implications. The nature of liberation demands a processive, dynamic educational methodology. This methodology must be anticipatory, praxis-based, imagistic, and experience-centered. It must be filled with a true hearing of each other. It must foster the creation of new knowledge and of new realities together, through narration of stories and celebrations of women's lives. It must create ways to comfort and sustain women on their journey.¹ It must be women-centered.

The Context

The context in which this educational methodology must function is the subculture of women, as described in Chapter 3. The factor of gender has caused the larger society to treat women differently than men. Women have been separated out, to some extent, from a large section of their cultures. As a result, they have developed their own subculture, with a particular set of values, beliefs, and behavior.

The studies of women's subculture indicate the need for a liberating biblical education that is both compensatory and constructive, healing and re-creative. Bible study is an important source of healing since the Bible

¹ Since I am a woman, I could also say "to sustain us on our journey." However, the use of we can include the reader, who may be male. In this particular context I wish to emphasize that this methodology is for women.

has been the instrument of so much hurt. The issue of the images of woman as inferior and evil must be dealt with. The issues of narrow social roles and limited economic and political power must be reexamined in light of biblical interpretation, past and present. At the same time, women can begin constructing their own knowledge of themselves and of what truth is. They can employ new principles of biblical interpretation. They can create a new self-image for themselves. They can discover and celebrate God-within. This kind of liberating biblical education cannot take place without liberating biblical hermeneutics.

Liberating Biblical Hermeneutics

Four dialectical hermeneutics have been proposed in Chapter 4 that could help women approach biblical texts and traditions in a new and liberating manner. They are: (1) a hermeneutic of suspicion and monotheism, (2) a hermeneutic of God's bias for oppressed women and God's grace working through evil, (3) a hermeneutic of remembrance and anticipation, and (4) a hermeneutic of women's knowledge and God's mystery. These liberating hermeneutics provide tools for evaluating other interpretations of the text. They help women find sources of revelation in themselves and in the Bible.

Educational Insights

The work of other religious educators, described in Chapter 2, has contributed important insights to a liberating educational methodology for women. The Bible as a

record of human experience has been highlighted. The importance of historical-critical tools for understanding and entering into the world of the biblical texts has been emphasized. The confrontative aspect of the Bible has been examined. The participatory and explorative nature of education has been described. Liberation was linked with participatory, dialogical, and problem-posing education. The processive nature of reality was demonstrated. All these ideas, and others, form the strands that weave together to form a liberating methodology of biblical education for women.

A Liberating Educational Methodology for Women

The model that will be described here is only one possibility for liberating biblical education. The ideas that have been reviewed in this chapter are threads that can be woven together in many different ways. This model grows out of the author's context, as described previously.

Our model for liberating biblical education has three dimensions: hearing, naming, and re-creation. Each of these dimensions requires a particular educational process and a particular content. Each dimension encourages specific roles for the teacher and students. Each one functions in a special way to make liberation accessible.²

² The idea of a separate function, mode or process, content or substance for different parts of the educational model, I owe to Brueggemann, The Creative Word.

Although these dimensions are listed in a certain order, they can occur in almost any order. Since they are dimensions, rather than steps, they can occur simultaneously, or in combinations. They can also happen sequentially. This sequence makes the dimensions clearer to understand and implement.

Hearing

The first dimension in liberating biblical education is hearing. To understand the full range of what is to be heard, we must remember the processive nature of individuals, communities, tradition and experience, as explained by Mary Elizabeth Moore.³ We as individuals stand at each moment at intersections: intersections of past, present and future encounters with God, intersections with other individuals, traditions, our experience, and other communities. Our traditions are experienced by us through the lens of past experiences and future hopes. These traditions have been shaped too by other communities, individuals, and encounters with God.

To study the Bible is to bring together a community of individual women with a body of texts and traditions. All of these, we have just stated, are in the process of transformation. All are continually changing through their interaction with each other. The women's lives have been affected by the biblical traditions. The traditions are

³ M. E. Moore, 86-117.

being shaped by past and present interpretations. Education occurs at this complex intersection.

Crucial to the study of the Bible is the dimension of hearing. Hearing occurs at this intersection of women and their experience, community and traditions. Each of these elements needs to be heard into speech. Each needs to be heard so deeply that new life arises in them.

The process that shapes hearing is silence. A few educators such as Ross Snyder and Nelle Morton have mentioned the importance of silence in religious education.⁴ Silence is central to the heart of mystery. Both human and divine experience have mystery at their center. Silence allows for the entry of the speech that is to be heard, the text that is to be read. This silence is the silence of choice, not of oppression.⁵ Acceptance and affection are the qualities of this silence. This silence, as Morton put it, precedes the Word.⁶

Silence is an element of importance that is often forgotten in education. The silence of hearing is essential for communication between people. The words of the speaker are heard only if received in silence, mental and physical. If the mind or mouth of the listener are not

⁴ See Snyder, "Encounter, I-Thou, Love, Teacher-Therapist." His ideas also shape, in part, the following discussion on communication.

⁵ Tillie Olsen discusses the two different kinds of silence in Silences (New York: Dell, 1983).

⁶ Morton, The Journey is Home, 55.

silent, the words of the other cannot be understood. The heart of dialogue, then, is silence.

Silence also allows time for thoughts, images and questions to take form in the students. Silence allows honest feelings to surface. Ideas, feelings and images can be mentally explored and thought about from a variety of perspectives. Images and feelings evoked in the hearing can be contemplated. Silence therefore is the milieu for exploration, meditation and contemplation. It also allows knowledge of oneself to deepen.

Silence, however, can be forbidding or accepting. Every child has had the experience of wondering if the teacher's silence after the student has asked or answered a question is the silence of approval or disapproval. The quality of the teacher's silence affects learning. Women, who often feel incompetent, even stupid, in educational settings, need to experience the silence of acceptance and affection. Women, who have been silenced by the talkative interruptions of men and teachers, need to experience silence that encourages them to talk. Silence is also important for the students to practice when listening to each other, so that each woman feels accepted and heard.

Silence in the classroom has been feared by those in charge. Educators feel compelled to fill in gaps of silence with words. Yet a long silence often draws out the quiet and shy ones. It may let surface questions students were hesitant to ask. In religious education teachers are

full of words to be imparted: biblical stories, theological ideas, moral strictures--all to be spoken in the limited amount of time allotted. Silence rescues students, and teachers, from the chaotic sea of a plethora of ideas not yet grounded in the students' experience.

For example, the study of the tragic story of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:30-40) could be enhanced by silence, at least initially. It could be narrated, or read, to the silent group. The first response could be an explorative and meditative silence. The temptation of the educator might be to immediately describe the historical context of the story, to raise analytical questions, to propose reasons for the existence of such a story. Silence allows the women students to hear the story in its depth, and to hear the way the story resonates in their being. The questions they ask later, the feelings they share, will initiate an educational process shaped by them. The learners will become true participants in the process of exploration and dialogue. They will have a connection to the ideas and questions the teacher, and others, have to share.

Finally, silence is the medium in which the Holy Spirit can most effectively work. Silence seems to open the human spirit more fully to the Holy. Millenia of human experience have demonstrated that silence is necessary for communion with God. Creativity, wholeness and peace are strengthened by silence. Holy Spirit sparks the wisdom, creativity, and caring that comes out of silence.

The process of hearing also requires narration.

Silence and narration form a dialectic, both necessary aspects of one process. Each is to be found in the other. The quality of silent hearing is found within narration. At the same time silence has a narrative, communicative quality about it.

Narration is an imaginative process. It is filled with feelings, actions, events, pictures. It is not analytical or evaluative. It captures the imaginations and feelings of the hearers. It immerses the hearers "in the stories and symbols constitutive of their religious identity."⁷ It can also immerse narrator and listeners in the stories and symbols constitutive of their personal identity.

Narration is never forced or demanded ("our captors required of us songs. . . . How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" Psalm 137). It springs out spontaneously and naturally. It functions as a gift, an offering to others to be shared together.

Women are often skilled in narration. That which has come to be called gossip can be analyzed as a series of narrative sharings.⁸ One of the basic skills all humans naturally work hard to learn as children is narration.

⁷ Boys, "Access to Traditions and Transformation," 28.

⁸ The word gossip comes from Old English, *godsibb*: person related to one in God. Women's "gossip" often still carries the quality of care and relationship of the original definition.

Children and adults both enjoy launching into narrations about themselves and others. Narration allows humans to objectify experience, to set it apart from themselves and contemplate it. It also allows them to share experiences with others. Such sharing draws people together into community. Narration is an important skill in the learning process.

Educators employ narration in children's educational process. Yet they often forget to use it with adults. This lack may be the result of dualistic thinking which separates objective and subjective. In this mind set subjective is personal and inferior. Narration is by nature personal. It may be seen as too subjective and less valuable than more "impersonal" intellectual modes, such as analysis and interpretation. Yet learning is more meaningful when the personal side is touched. Narration helps this to happen.

To encourage narration means that pre-planned lessons may have to be abandoned or modified as the class progresses. Narration often interrupts the planned educational process. It can change the content of education also. To narrate the story of Jephthah's daughter, for example, may bring out many other stories in a woman's group. One woman might remember seeing an Indian woman throw herself on her husband's funeral pyre in the movie "Around the World in 80 Days." Another may have a personal experience of sacrifice to relate. Another may want to narrate the tale told in

Sophie's Choice, by William Styron. Unexpected and surprising narrations may emerge. A lot of time could elapse before the group returned to the text. This time spent in narration, however, is essential to the educational process. It opens up the dimension of hearing.

The content of the narration dimension of hearing is story. This can be described more specifically for liberating education with women.

1. The content of hearing is women's stories. The stories of the women in the study group, when they are offered, are to be heard in the depth of affectionate and sympathetic silence. In this way the pain and joy of women's experience break out of their unnatural silencing. Women are heard into speech. The consciousness of their experience, especially of their experience of pain and oppression, develops. This experience can also be very deeply hidden, denied, or overlaid with the comforts of the American middle-class life-style. In the cases of these women, many stories and much hearing may take place before consciousness of oppression and pain emerges.

Hearing can be therefore a painful and difficult process. The individuals in the group can tell their stories very differently. They may resent stories that tell of anger and pain, or they may resent stories of happiness and comfort. Hearing and acceptance must consciously be encouraged and nurtured within the group.

Women are often aware that they share stories about

themselves and their feelings fairly easily. They especially tell stories about their relationships: how they met their husbands, how they named and had and reared their children, how they relate to people at work. Hearing stories sparks more stories. Stories grow out of hearing the biblical stories, as well as hearing personal stories.

Nelle Morton warns that stories must be heard to the end. She tells the story of one group leader who interrupted a woman's story, perhaps because she could not bear this woman's pain. She asked others to share. The interruption silenced the woman who was talking. It also silenced the other women, who did not feel comfortable starting new stories at that point.⁹ To encourage stories is to commit oneself to sharing another's pain and joy to the end.

2. The content of hearing is also biblical stories.

Biblical stories about women are the most interesting for women. However, stories that do not contain women can have women added to them by the study group. In order to hear the stories of the Bible, several steps may be taken.

a. Preconceptions about the biblical story must be made conscious and set aside.

The ideas and images that women have about the story from past experience must be made conscious. Setting aside these ideas and images occurs when stories are shared about

⁹ Morton, The Journey is Home, 205-206.

the impact of this biblical story on women's lives. For example, in order to read the Eve texts in Genesis 2-3, women first tell the story of Eve as they know it. The students can make a list of adjectives that they have heard used to describe Eve. Adjectives such as "temptress," "seductive," "stupid," "evil," "manipulative," "simple," "foolish," may emerge. Feelings are shared that the women have about Eve. A frequent comment is that the story of Eve makes women feel bad about being a woman. The Eve story, some women say, makes them feel that women are blamed for evil. Stories that share the impact of the Eve story on their lives are told.

b. The text itself must then be read and heard. Once preconceptions are aired, a new hearing of the text is possible. The text is listened to through the lens of the woman or women in the story. Take the Eve stories again. Once the images of Eve as temptress, stupid and foolish one, the sole cause of evil, etc., are aired and set aside, women can notice the drama of the discussion with the serpent, the seeming intelligence of Eve's reasons for eating the fruit, and the complicity of Adam. Women often notice that God never talks to Eve, only to Adam. The story is heard in a new way.

c. A hermeneutic of remembrance and anticipation can be used to re-create the story from a new point of view, in this case Eve's point of view. Eve's story is retold through her eyes. Every woman may tell Eve's story

differently. Different forms of storytelling may be used: drama, poetry, pantomime, dance, song, written narration, etc. In the case of biblical women for whom historical evidence has survived, historical restoration can be engaged in. Many forms of retelling and remembering biblical stories now exist that are more complete in their historical understanding. These reconstructions can be used as resources for the group in its studies.

This hermeneutic also involved searching for the good news for women in the text (opinions will differ on whether it exists). God's work, if visible, is identified in the story and anticipated in the future. God's story is also heard into speech, whenever possible. For example, some may tell the story of God who talked with Eve, though the conversations were not recorded. This is the story of a God whose work gets hidden by androcentric men. Others may tell a different story of God, of a God who ignores women.

Thus the substance of the hearing dimension is the stories of women's experience, the stories of the Bible, the stories of the effect of these stories on women's lives, and the stories of God. These stories brim with images and feelings. They often raise uncomfortable questions, filled with anger and pain. The hearing dimension of biblical education often leads to analysis and critical consciousness, aspects of the naming dimension of biblical education.

The role of the teacher and the students is to hear.

The teacher is a co-learner and co-hearer. Yet she is the leader in encouraging this dimension of biblical education. She leads this process by sharing her own stories, or by encouraging others to share theirs. She empowers the other women to hear the text by demonstrating the three steps. She can aid in the hermeneutic of remembrance and anticipation by bringing in re-creations of the story written by others. She allows for her own growth by participating in the hearing and sharing.

The teacher also introduces silence into the educational process. She encourages the silence of listening to an uninterrupted story. She structures in the silence of meditation and contemplation. She models the silence of acceptance and affection. The teacher's support and encouragement can truly help women to be heard and to find their own voice, as pointed out in Chapter 3.

However, the dimension of hearing is at bottom one of grace and love. It cannot be forced or manipulated into existence by the teacher. The group must contain enough caring to allow hearing to happen. It must be open to the Spirit of wisdom and love.

The dimension of hearing functions to form or deepen community. Hearing can only happen in community. Hearing deepens caring, and caring feeds back to deepen hearing. The more that hearing into speech occurs, the more tightly community is woven together. As women share stories and

silence, trust and understanding grow. In a context of trust and understanding, women are willing to share more openly and be more vulnerable. The willingness to be open and vulnerable makes relationships deep and community strong.

Hearing, true and caring, functions over time to form ekklesia gynaikon, or women-church. Women-church is a group of women-identified people, a community of equals engaged in dialogue with biblical religion.¹⁰ Women-church is a liberative community, an important support for the liberation journey. In women-church stories are shared of pain and of healing. A central characteristic of women-church is the ability to celebrate growth and victories together: for example, the use of inclusive language in a particular church, or a new understanding of a biblical woman such as Sarah thanks to new study, or a woman's new experience of self-confidence, etc. Women-church is a group searching for God together and worshipping together.

Women-church seems to be fairly rare at this time in history. Yet many women's groups, in church and out, are developing some of these characteristics. The women in these groups engage in hearing each other, in celebrating personal growth, and in worship. They search for God together. They are often not consciously feminist,

¹⁰ Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, xiv.

however. They would not necessarily think of themselves as engaging in a journey of liberation. Yet they form important environments for women. Through their practice of hearing, they often do make liberation accessible to women.

Naming

The dimension of naming is a reflective and interpretive dimension. It involves the action of shattering and creating. Naming the world was, in the Genesis 2 story of creation, a task given to the man. In liberating biblical education, women must take on this task and claim it as their own. For, unfortunately, man has indeed named the world. Whoever names the world creates it in their image, and takes power over it. Naming, for women, is therefore an act of power.

The process of naming involves praxis, reflection/action. To name the reality that one experiences in biblical texts and in one's life is to reflect and to act. To name an experience as oppressive and painful is to strip away ideologies that have been used to cover up oppression. To name an experience as liberating is to turn toward, and to bring more fully into being, new possibilities for freedom.

The way of knowing in naming is through the reflection/action praxis of investigating questions and posing problems. The process of investigation must be dialogical. The dialogue in this context is among students and teacher, and between the study group and the biblical texts.

Dialogue grows out of listening to the questions each woman brings and sharing ideas. It comes from looking for the questions raised by the biblical text. Dialogue is women questioning text, and text questioning women.

The process of naming contains four elements: encounter, reflection, interpretation, and evaluation. Its focus is on the interaction of biblical traditions and texts with the experience of the women in the study group. It begins with the encounter of a biblical text within the women's study community. It requires reflection about the impact of this text upon the reality in which the women live. It necessitates reflection on meanings that have been ascribed to the text in the past. New interpretations in the context of liberative community are then developed. At the same time the biblical texts must be evaluated as oppressive or liberative, as revelation or non-revelation. Although these elements of encounter, reflection, interpretation, and evaluation are separated for analytical purposes, they often occur at the same time.

1. The first element is the encounter of the community and the biblical text. This encounter works two ways: the text is placed within the reality of the community and the community is placed within the reality of the text. In order for the two parties to encounter each other properly, they must be known. Encounter therefore requires the use of analytic tools.

a. Women must be taught historical-critical tools in order to understand the text more fully. In spite of the church's failure to teach the skills of historical criticism to laypeople, some have found it a possible and exciting task. Laypersons are eager to learn as much as possible about the Bible. Laywomen especially need their intellectual skills sharpened and affirmed. They are not surprised by concepts such as form criticism and redaction criticism. They are excited to be able to employ the tools of biblical scholars. They are usually pleased at the way these tools open up the biblical world to them and allow encounter.

An important step therefore is to approach the text critically. This critical encounter follows after an initial hearing of the text as described above. Now one can return to the text utilizing such lenses as text, form and redaction criticism. Different translations are compared. The teacher or a commentary provides an understanding of key words in the original language. In the Genesis creation stories, for example, the meanings of adam, ish, and ishah can be discussed. The group compares the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. The origin of these stories, their structure, their purpose in the communities for which they were written, are investigated.

Through this kind of exegesis women can encounter the text in a new way. They can enter the world of those for whom the texts were written. They can see the ways in

which the texts spoke to the community for which they were written. They can begin to see the evolution of the biblical texts, and the many historical situations to which they spoke before they were finalized.

b. Exegesis is also needed of women's reality.¹¹

Women can be guided in studying their reality like anthropologists, as participant-observers. This study may grow out of the women's personal stories. It can also grow out of a comparison of contemporary culture with the culture represented in the biblical text. Differences and similarities in economic, political, social, and cultural areas can be examined. For example, a study of Luke's birth narratives reveals the important roles played by Elizabeth, Mary and Anna. A search of the roles women played in the early church community for whom these texts were written is initiated. This study then raises the questions of the roles of women in the contemporary church community. For example, do women act as prophets in today's religious communities? Students can investigate this question through interviews and observation. They can also read studies about women and the church. An encounter with their own situation has grown out of the encounter with the text.

2. Reflection follows encounter.

a. The reality that is reflected on is that found at the intersection of women's experience and the biblical

¹¹ Sanders, Canon and Community, 67.

traditions. In other words, reflection focuses on the impact of the text on women's lives. For example, the Eve story has given some women a deep-seated feeling of guilt. These feelings, and its cause, must be investigated.

Another example is to meditate on the impact of Mary of Nazareth on the way women are perceived. This question of the effect of Mary's story on the lives of women is extremely complex, having positive and negative aspects. This question would require extensive investigation and reflection.

b. Reflection includes comparing the world which the text originally addressed and the world of the reader. This reflection grows out of the exegesis of the situation of contemporary women and the exegesis of the biblical text, as described above in 1b. In addition, the difference in function of the text in the world and in the lives of the readers today must be investigated. The Eve and Adam texts, for example, functioned differently in the Yahwist's context than they do today. The difference in function becomes an object of reflection for the group.

c. Another problem to be examined is the many interpretations of the text that have shaped our own understandings of the text and ourselves. Past interpretations must be studied and reflected upon. The difference in interpretations may be seen as problems to be investigated. The contexts to which the different interpretations speak may then also be objects of investigation. The harm or

help these interpretations have been to women is an important subject for reflection.

Again, let us take Eve. Many theologians, preachers and poets have discussed and interpreted this story. Some of these interpretations could be shared and reflected upon. Gregory of Nazianzus, a fourth-century Church Father, described Eve as "vain," "fraudulent," "immodest," "self-seeking," and "prurient."¹² Milton's speaker, in Paradise Lost, says of Eve:

For well I understand in the prime end
Of nature her the inferior, in the mind
And inward faculties, which most excel,
In inward also her resembling less
His image who made both, . . .¹³

Art, literature and music reflect various views of Eve. Portraits of Eve over the centuries in art, by such artists as Michelangelo, Blake, Rodin, Gauguin, etc., can be compared and reflected upon. The contexts in which all of these representations of Eve were created also need to be considered. Although the historical contexts differ widely, most represent misogynist understandings of Eve.

3. Interpretation is necessary in order to probe the questions raised by reflection. Of course, interpretation has been occurring all through the educational process. At this point, interpretation must be made explicit.

¹² Quoted by John A. Phillips, Eve: The History of an Idea (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34.

a. The hermeneutics at work in the text must be examined. Sanders' work is helpful here. Earlier traditions quoted or resignified in the current biblical text can be looked up. The hermeneutics by which they are adapted to the new context can be identified. Consider, for example, the use of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in Mark's passion narratives. Another example is the study of the many older traditions resignified in Luke's birth narratives. The students can trace the reworking of verses from Second Isaiah. They can compare Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) to Hannah's (1 Samuel 2:1-10). They can identify the hermeneutics Luke uses to adapt the texts to his context.

b. The texts should be studied using clearly stated hermeneutics on the part of teacher and students. The dialectical hermeneutic of monotheism and suspicion encourages the search for God's work of love. At the same time it allows oppressive ideas and images to be treated as the human, patriarchal creations that they are. The hermeneutic of God's bias for the oppressed and of God's grace working through evil reveals good news of liberation and wholeness for women, if it can be found in that text. The hermeneutic of remembrance and anticipation frees the mind to seek new interpretations. The hermeneutic of women's knowledge and God's mystery makes the search for understanding exciting, even as it makes clear the limits of what can be understood. It opens the door to mystery.

The Eve stories must be approached using these dialectical hermeneutics. The stories reveal a misogynist view of woman, even when later patriarchal interpretations are removed. The dialogue with the evil serpent centers on Eve. Eve is created second, is named by man, is not spoken to by God.¹⁴ Suspicion is certainly appropriate here, at the same time as women search for the one God, their God. The ways in which God is hidden by this story is brought out with this hermeneutic of suspicion and monotheism. The use of the hermeneutic of remembrance and anticipation helps women see the story through Eve's eyes. It pushes them to grieve for the role that Eve has been made to play in history and in women's lives. It helps women anticipate God's work of emancipation for Eve and all women.

Women's lives, as well as the texts, can be interpreted in light of these hermeneutics. Where is God revealed in women's lives; and where is God hidden? Where do women need to speak out for justice for themselves, as God's voice? Where, on the other hand, do they require God's grace? In what new ways can they remember and re-create their own pasts? In what ways can they anticipate God in their future? The use of these hermeneutics in both text and lives opens the door for dialogue between the two.

¹⁴ Phillips, 55-57.

c. Images must be interpreted, as well as hermeneutics. The importance of images must be a focus in the educational process. Images in biblical texts and in women's lives must be identified, reflected on and interpreted. This focus on images really begins in hearing the story. It reappears in the encounter and reflection steps of naming. The images of Eve, for example, were listed when the story was first heard. They emerge again as students reflect on the many interpretations of Eve presented in theology, art and literature. At the stage of interpretation, they are looked at in connection with the dialectical hermeneutics. The image of Eve as the less-than-human source of all evil is to be treated with suspicion. At the same time, the image of an Eve, created by the one God in God's image (Genesis 1:37), can be developed by the group. The hermeneutic of God's bias for oppressed women and God's grace can be applied also. Eve can be named as caught in the oppression of sexism. Students can search out the ways in which God could be seen as her advocate. At the same time, God's grace working through her sinfulness, and Adam's sinfulness, is named. Eve, of course, is a non-historical character. Her story is real, however, in the life of Western civilization and in women's lives.

4. Interpretation demands evaluation. Out of encounter, reflection, and interpretation comes a consciousness

awakened and critical, aware of the salvific and destructive aspects of biblical text and its effect on women's reality. The liberating and oppressive nature of ideas, images, interpretations, etc., found in the biblical texts and traditions must be evaluated. The biblical traditions and texts can be named as revealing, bearers of God's good news. The effect on women of their existence must be evaluated. Naming a text demonic can be an exorcism. For example, naming 1 Timothy 2:13-15 as demonic can exorcise the image of evil Eve from the image of ourselves as women. Naming is also a healing, as for example naming Eve as "mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20) and including this name in the image of ourselves.

Evaluation is also made of women's lives. Interpreted with liberating hermeneutics, the biblical texts speak to women's lives in a variety of ways. They challenge women to see themselves as fully human and fully created in God's image. They call women to struggle for wholeness for themselves and others. They help women denounce the evils of injustice. Seen with liberating hermeneutics, they heal the wounds caused by past interpretations. They challenge women to confront misogynist use of the Bible. They invite women to confront themselves, to uncover their participation in their own, and others', oppression.

Naming, in sum, consists of encounter, reflection, interpretation and evaluation. It involves a dialogical, problem-posing process. Its substance is the biblical

texts and traditions, the lives of the women students, and the way the two have interacted. Naming makes conscious the sources of oppression in the interaction of tradition and women's reality. It also witnesses to the sources of liberation in this interaction and the places where God is present. Liberating dialectical hermeneutics are essential to true naming.

The role of the teacher is complex in the naming process. The teacher functions as instructor, giving training in the use of certain analytical tools. She helps students develop their skills of textual criticism and interpretation. She is also the bearer of new information, other interpretations, other images and other namings, such as in feminist theology. She brings in art reproductions, poetry, literature, sermons, feminist stories, to help the steps of encounter, reflection, interpretation and evaluation.

At the same time, the teacher is co-partner in investigating the reality of text, women's lives and the intersection of the two. She investigates her own reality, poses her own problems, aware that the realities and problems of the other women may be different. Together with the other students, new knowledge of these realities is created.

The teacher is also mid-wife. Naming one's reality is the labor of birthing. It is painful and tiring. It raises many emotions: anger and fear, excitement and joy.

Naming for women forces a reevaluation of faith, of concepts of revelation and truth, of the locus of authority. The good teacher helps this process proceed at an appropriately gentle pace. She is able to help the students deal with the many emotions being raised. She encourages the love and support necessary for continued healing and growth.

The role of the students is similar to that of the teacher. However, they follow the teacher's leadership. They are to be co-investigators into their reality. They can unearth old interpretations in the form of sermon, art and literature. They can bring new information, new images, new names. They are to nurture and support each other in the pain and joy of discovery of oppression and liberation. They too are midwives, to each other, to the teacher.

Naming creates critical consciousness. It empowers women to investigate their reality at the intersection of biblical tradition and their own experience. Women can identify and name the aspects of their lives that keep them from wholeness. They can identify and name the aspects of the Bible that keep them from liberation and empowerment.

Naming also gives women the tools to encounter and interpret the Bible in liberating ways. It opens up new possibilities for encountering God. Once biblical texts can be named as liberating or oppressive, God can be looked for and met in the liberating texts. Energy is not wasted

trying to meet God in oppressive texts. Women do not have to struggle to believe that God is somehow revealed through texts that cause them pain and harm. Naming awakens women to their own reality, a reality that includes not only oppression, but also the liberation of knowing their own strengths and of encountering the God-who-is-present.

Therefore the function of naming is to empower women to be feminist liberation theologians. They become this generation's prophetic shapers of biblical texts and traditions. They name the ways in which God works through these texts and traditions. They denounce the sins of patriarchy that hide God. They describe the ways in which God is present and acting in their lives and in society today.

Re-creation

The final educational dimension is re-creation. Re-creation is the most imaginative and joyful dimension of liberating biblical education. It occurs to some extent within the other two dimensions. However, it also has a shape of its own.

The process of re-creation is construction and action. Such activity is a response to naming oppression in biblical traditions and women's lives. This naming has made freedom a greater possibility. This naming has also included identifying God at work at this intersection. Re-creation both responds to this presence of God and makes God present. It brings God's future acts of liberation

into the present.

The mode of learning of this dimension is what James Botkin, Mahdi Elmandira, and Mircea Malitza call innovative and anticipatory.¹⁵ This learning process is based on imagination and a developed sense of the future. It calls for "an increased emphasis on conjectures, hypotheses, scenarios, simulations, models. . . ."¹⁶ Re-creation employs this kind of learning in a religious context.

Let us continue with the Eve story. Anticipatory learning would call for speculating on the nature of society if the Eve story had not been preserved. The story could be rewritten in a variety of ways: Adam could be the one that speaks with the serpent and Eve the one that speaks with God. The story could be written with Yahweh as Goddess: how would that change the story, and its impact on women? Stories written by feminists about the meeting of Eve and Lillith could be read. Mary Daly's call to overthrow God the Father could be shared.¹⁷ A future with a new Eve story could be simulated, dramatized. The new relationship of God and woman could be danced and sung. These activities initiate a new understanding and a new, liberating reality for women.

¹⁵ Botkin, et al. See Chapter 1, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹⁷ Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father.

The content of re-creation is determined by the community of women.¹⁸ It can consist of poetry, story, dance, art, song, liturgy, and worship. At the heart of this content are images and metaphors. These images may be drawn from biblical traditions and texts, from other sources of women's traditions, or from the creative minds of the community. These images serve to shatter the old oppressive realities. They create new, healing and liberative realities. An example is the song "Sarah's Circle" which has become popular in women's groups. The words, sung to the tune of "Jacob's Ladder," create a new image: "We are dancing Sarah's circle (repeat 3 times), sisters, brothers, all." The hierarchical image of a ladder up to God is shattered. The circle image creates community and puts God within it. Songs, stories, and dances describing and celebrating a liberating, whole reality help to bring in this reality. Some books are now being published full of prayers, rituals, and meditations for women. Rosemary Radford Ruether's Women-Church, and Miriam Therese Winter's Woman Prayer, Woman Song are excellent resources.¹⁹

These creative constructions can also produce images

¹⁸ See Fiorenza's discussion of creative actualization in Bread Not Stone, 21. A good resource for the content of re-creation is Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women-Church.

¹⁹ Ruether, Women-Church; Miriam Therese Winter, Woman Prayer, Woman Song (Philadelphia: Medical Mission Sisters/Meyer Stone, 1987).

that bring to mind the memory of the oppression of others in the past and in the world today. They carry expressions of anger and grief over this oppression. Public lamentation and grief shatters the numbness and illusions of comfort.²⁰ It opens the gates to the possibility of a new more just reality. This author, for example, created a dance interpretation of Holly Near's song, "Oh Come Smile With Us." This song expresses the necessary agony of sharing a friend's pain. It is a song about community. The dance was a response to the dramatic recounting of the story of Perpetua and Felicita, two early Christian martyrs. The music and movement brought the community of women together. Tears expressed their common anguish; holding hands expressed their bonding and solidarity.

The new images and metaphors at the heart of these creations re-create the community. The community is comforted, nourished, and empowered by them. These acts of re-creation bring about spiritual, psychological, social and political change. The stories, art, poetry, rituals, and worship liturgies act to re-create the old world and the old God into a multitude of new, liberating, justice-filled images: images of new roles, new power structures, new histories, new wholeness. In so doing, the community becomes a mirror of God's activity in the world, and the

²⁰ This idea from Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 48-50.

locus of God's revelation. The re-creating community becomes a visible image of the liberation journey, with God at its heart.

Teachers and learners play the similar roles in this dimension. They are sources of creativity, encouragement, and inspiration. They are sharers of re-creative resources, of ideas, feelings, and images. They are co-participants in mourning and celebration. They are mirrors of God's love to each other.

The teacher, however, is still often the initiator. She initiates the group into the experience of re-creation. She provides resources and ideas. She models the variety of creative forms re-creation may take. She encourages others to initiate re-creative activities.

The teacher must also be sensitive to timing. She must know when to step back. She must sense when re-creation is possible and necessary. She may also need to keep re-creation from coming too soon. This sense of timing is extremely important in women's groups. Many women do not want to spend much time in the naming dimension. They are extremely uncomfortable with the anger and pain raised in this dimension. They try to push the group into celebration and re-creation prematurely. In this author's experience, premature celebration raises even more anger and frustration. It functions to block women who have begun the liberation journey. Premature re-creation can be oppressive.

In summary, to engage in re-creation is to engage in the transformation of oneself and the world. Re-creation functions to transform the intersection of women's experience and biblical traditions in a healing manner. It tears down the barriers of patriarchy found in the tradition and in women's lives. It brings in the light of liberation. It opens the door for God's Spirit to sweep in.

The dimensions of hearing, naming and re-creation make accessible all four features of liberation: the radical journey, transformative images, critical consciousness, and liberative community. They form a methodology that moves beyond dichotomies such as text/experience, tradition/transformation, mind/emotion. This methodology suggests instead that we join those who call for education at the intersections of a holistic, processive reality. This methodology is also shaped to meet women's needs and to help them grow, intellectually, spiritually, psychologically, politically. It makes clear the hermeneutics with which biblical texts and contemporary lives need to be interpreted. It opens the soul to new images and metaphors of God, humanity, and self. Its process can be loving, nurturing and fun. Through this process women can answer the questions that give life.²¹ They can experience who they are and how they are to act.

²¹ Posed by James A. Sanders. See Chapter 4, p. 179.

Problems and Implications

Several possible problems could arise in implementing this model. Some of its basic theological concepts are not generally accepted (or at least publicly admitted) in mainline Protestant churches. Protestant theology generally promotes the understanding of the Bible as the Word of God. To say that the Bible is written by men, and can function demonically, is shocking to most Protestants. Reform theology does not advocate approaching the Bible with a hermeneutic of suspicion. A hermeneutic of remembrance might also be viewed askance, as mythical embroidering of the Word of God.

Yet most people pick and choose the portions of the Bible that speak to them as revelation. The rest they ignore, or try to explain away. Sanders calls this phenomenon of only using a small number of biblical texts "the canon within the canon." People stick to texts they know and that make them feel comfortable. They learn a few Old Testament stories, some of the Gospels, and parts of Paul's letters. The rest of the canon is ignored.

Protestants in this country are also not accustomed to applying hermeneutics of suspicion to biblical texts. To do so would probably seem to them an attack on their faith. However, introduced with a hermeneutic of monotheism, the hermeneutic of suspicion may seem less threatening. People often approach some texts with practical suspicion. For example, texts which describe the slaughter of entire

cities as God's will are interpreted with suspicion. Many Christian people see them as human interpretation of events: the slaughter of cities is understood as the victors' interpretation of God's will. Thus the hermeneutic of suspicion is not completely alien to many Christians. It simply has not been made explicit.

The hermeneutic of remembrance is not entirely alien to the church population, either. The seeds of this hermeneutic are found in Sunday School. Stories of Jesus as a little boy, reconstructions of Joseph's relationship with his brothers, the life of the Israelite slaves in Egypt, are found in many curriculum pieces. These are reconstructions and rememberings. Perhaps if the educator begins with these Sunday School stories, the more radical acts called for by the hermeneutic of remembrance will be easier to understand. Remembering women who are or are not mentioned in the text will be seen in the light of the way the community of faith is always reinterpreting the texts.

A second problem is the goal of liberation. Many women in the church frankly state that they are liberated, or that they do not need to be liberated. The comforts of life in the United States, combined with the American ideology of family, covers up the pain and oppression. Women who say they feel no pain frequently experience economic discrimination, the burden of caring for family before self, and the major responsibility for housework in addition to outside employment. Often, unfortunately, it

takes a crisis such as divorce, widowhood, or sudden loss of work or income for many women to become aware of the amount of pain they have been feeling. A crisis brings to light societal discrimination and personal inadequacies that have been promoted by the cultural system.

A third problem is that some clergy do not take the intelligence and faith of laypeople, especially women, seriously. They fail to teach historical critical tools with which to study the Bible. They hide the hermeneutics that they employ. They try to make the Bible easily approachable and digestible. The result is that the texts are not heard, named or re-created. Neither are the students. The Word of God, found in the interaction of the two, thus often remains hidden.

The fourth problem is human sin and imperfection. Women's communities reflect this reality. They are not perfect mirrors of God's love and justice. They, like the Bible, reveal some of God's light. They can also hide some of it. We must be careful not to over-idealize these communities. Furthermore, communities of white North American women must make contact with women of other colors and nationalities in order to name oppression and create liberation. In most contexts, unfortunately, this contact is rarely made.

This model of educational methodology is important. A great number of women in Christian churches participate in Bible studies. Denominations write and produce yearly

Bible studies for women's organizations. Pastors teach morning Bible study which traditionally only women have attended. Bible study is often offered for adult education. In all of these situations, women can experience the Bible as a supporter of the status quo. They will never name its oppressive power or experience its liberating voice. This model may push others to develop liberating biblical education also.

This model needs to be tried and tested by biblical educators in wide variety of contexts. Women's responses need to be heard. Of special interest would be the responses of women of different colors, economic classes or nations than the author's. The hope is that this model of biblical education would truly make liberation accessible to women from many different contexts.

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